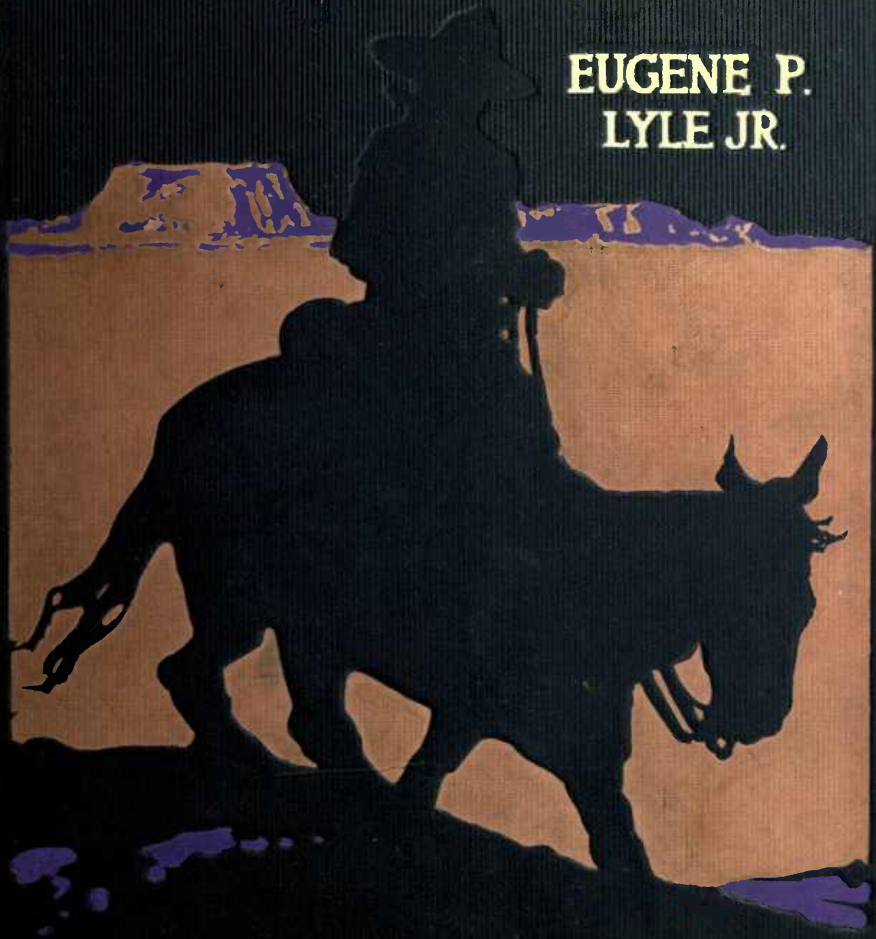
THE TRANSFORMATION OF KRAG

EUGENE P. LYLE JR.



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THE TRANSFORMATION OF KRAG

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"It was this, his past self, that sickened him"

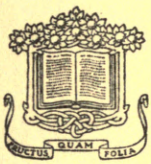
THE TRANSFORMATION OF KRAG

BY

EUGENE P. LYLE, JR.

Author of "The Missourian," "The Lone Star," Etc.

Illustrated by C. B. Falls



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PART I

THE FLEDGELING

CHAPTER ONE

A Dandy Little Go-cart for Two

"JEANNETTE," said the boy, ducking his head to peer under the witching hat of crisp straw and great red roses into the eyes of the girl beside him in the street car, "oughtn't there be a telescope go with it, or something?" He looked up at the overhanging brim.

"Why?" she demanded warily.

"I don't know, only it's so far; seems like, out there beyond the eaves, where what's left of the world, after you, begins."

"It's a pretty hat," purred Jeannette.

They were children — high school children — he twenty and she eighteen, and these lilting sallies were a trying-out of the immense universe of things about which they knew so little and were so curious. Taking the universe, as epitomized in the hat feminine, so easily and humorously, somehow made them feel accustomed and at home while yet only on the threshold. This was preparatory and necessary, for they were seniors, and here the month of May was on them already, and it was commencement week,with all the rush of festivity and weighty matters that that means. They were even now going to the Philomathean party given for the seniors at the home of Maisie Hacklette.

There were yet cable cars in those days, and these two occupied, as they did whenever they could, the front seat on the grip. It was their favourite. They were alone together up there, and no other passenger need be seen nor even exist. The worse the weather, the better; for then everybody crowded into the closed trailer behind and left them the more alone. They did not mind rushing in the teeth of icy blizzards; that only stirred the lofty combativeness of youth in them. Nor were they unmindful now of the caress of spring on their temples. The seat up front was their own private chariot. It was a dandy little go-cart for two, hitched up tight to the stars.

The high school knew, better than its psychology lesson, that Jeannette Chesbro and Jim Krag were a "case." The world could have guessed it easily enough, too, only to see the ruddy happiness in their cheeks as they sped past on the grip's front seat. Jeannette's hand was in Jim's coat pocket, and Jim's hand was in the same pocket; and Jeannette's scarf fluttering between them — and pinned to Jim's sleeve — left mere people waiting at crossings quite innocent of suspicion.

"What do you think, Jim?" She was the more exclamatory because he was the heavy-going, heavy-worded sort. "What — why, that little Maisie Hacklette wanted to send their victoria around for me."

The boy stiffened a little. His pride of a poor boy was instantly on guard. His countenance, at best a sallow gray, became almost sullen. Others had clubbed together to take the girls to the party in hacks. He

thought he detected a wistfulness in Jeannette's pretended scorn of the Hacklette victoria. He restively sensed a kitten-like luxuriousness in Jeannette at times. And as for himself, the sensitiveness that goes with patches had never healed.

She felt the change, and looked up at him, a little afraid. He was a blunt-spoken youngster, and his few words often impinged at an unexpected angle. One could never quite tell. She looked at the ominous rust-red deepening on each cheek-bone. She all but wondered if there were really an ugly nature lying dormant in this boy who was the school's best hero. As with the rest of the school, the feeling left her uneasy, despite the generosity that made his brutal ruggedness of character not only acceptable, but even lovable. She knew nothing of his shame and self-disgust when his sensitive, morbid, brooding nature got uppermost and dealt wounds, nor knew that his careless generosity was at bottom a species of contempt for his fellows.

The school was never quite sure that it had the right answer to Jim Krag. He was plain, square-featured, with heavy brows, steady, level, gray eyes, and dark bronze hair curling short and tenaciously on what at sight would be called a stubborn head. He had the quality of wearing well, and he was a latent explosion. By his second year the school was beginning to discover his charm, a charm partaking somewhat of that of a man believed to be always ready with a dangerous weapon. And yet, when they came to reflect, his unexpectedness was not a tangent at all, but a deep, merciless slash straight to the elusive essential of things. By his fourth year, as the

puzzled old principal himself said, they were all glorifying Jimmy Krag as a surcease of the Obvious.

The cable car took the sweep of a curve, and Jeannette clutched her hat. Glancing around to note if the roses were safe, Jim spoke.

"We'll walk back," he said succinctly.

Walking back would keep them longer together, and she tried to believe that that was what he meant. "Won't it be rather far?" she murmured dubiously.

"Rather," he said, "but it'll make you real friendly to street cars."

Jeannette pondered that for a block and a half. "You goose!" she decided at last. The little lady knew that in their child world Jim Krag conveyed more distinction than did victorias. "Why" — she sniffed disdainfully — "poor Maisie only wanted to keep me from coming with *you*. You are the *densest* thing and — now, stop frowning!"

Yet it fretted him to be teased about the little first-year girl, Maisie Hacklette. He would never have known her, even, except that the girls' society, the Philomatheans, had taken her in, and he had met her at their parties. In this commencement season she had timidly offered her home for the annual senior party, and had been exalted by the Philomatheans' gracious acceptance of her hospitality.

"Jeannette — I say, Jeannette," he demanded, "you're not a — snob — are you?"

He heard a gasp of indignation.

"Well, anyway," he went on, scowling thoughtfully,

"I like our small blow-outs best; that is, unless we rent the dancing academy."

She tried to catch his drift. "They *are* more exclusive," she agreed.

"No, no," he retorted. "It's because then we don't know — most of us don't — if anybody has a finer home than anybody else. But this big party business needs a big house. Don't you see, Jeannie, it only brings the big world down on top of us, when we're not ready for the big world yet?" He knotted his fists. "When I *am* ready, though ——" He stopped and laughed, as one pretends to laugh at one's secret ambitions.

"Here's our street," said Jeannette hastily.

Stepping from the car she tucked her elbow into his palm, caught step with a hop-skip, and gaily hurried him down a newly fashionable, maple-shaded avenue.

"Look, Jim, there's the place, there."

She pointed to a lawn festive with Japanese lanterns in the twilight, where there were white dresses among the lilac bushes, and young men, and now and then the clear note of laughter.

The residence was a fretted embroilment known as Queen Anne. It was capped by a box-like tower which the Hacklettes mentioned as the "cupola." One glance at the house, and the passer-by looked hopefully for the bronze mastiff on the lawn, and the passer-by was not disappointed. There was also the majestic antlered stag; also the bronze baby holding a bronze umbrella over a fountain basin.

"Isn't it a perfectly grand home?" sighed Jeannette.

"There'll be plenty of room, all right," said Jim, "so's everybody can have a good time."

Then, as the dusk under the maples seemed provided especially, and before she knew it, he had with frank earnestness kissed her beneath the big hat. "Now you're awful mad," he laughed; "but it's our senior party, girl, and it happens this once. How far can you swing on my arm?"

"Must have been forty feet that last time," she panted. "Oh, let's run; what if we are seniors?"

CHAPTER TWO

The Spirit of the Bronze Mastiff

THE young people had been a bit subdued. Of course, a party usually begins that way, until formality melts into exuberance, but here at the Hacklettes there was a feeling of being among strangers. No strangers were actually in sight, so the feeling must be attributed to the bronze mastiff and antlered stag, which coldly ornamental creatures seemed constantly to say:

"Oo-oo, on your life be stiff! Be stiff, for we are much money, oo-oo! And we are not here to let you forget it, oo-oo, oo-oo!"

One longed for a real bulldog. Then everybody breathed more enjoyably, for Jim Krag, with Jeannette Chesbro, was seen entering the high grilled gate.

Young men flocked their way. And the sprites in snowy white, they also came running across the lawn, and they frankly gathered around Jim Krag, and Jeannette was honest at last in not regretting the victoria. The sprites were used to waylaying Jim in the school corridors. To hear what he might say, and to provoke him to say it, was a constant quest with them. It had all the thrill of a shock. Yet a tongue petrific

never made fewer enemies. They felt that the strength of him belonged to them. Good old Jim Krag — so they thought of him.

A young man held up his hands for attention. He was the rooter chief of the athletic fields. "Get together, fellows! get together!" he shouted. "Are you ready? All right. Let her go. *What,*" he bellowed, "*lies beyond the Alps?*"

"*Ital-ee,*" they came back in thunderous unison.

Just here it is to be confessed that Jimmy Krag had the night before won the oratory medal, thereby topping all other annual honours in the realm of school land, and that his subject had been: "Beyond the Alps" *et cetera.* The medal itself, precious sheet of dazzling gold and as yet ungraven with the victor's name, was at the moment pinned in Jeannette Chesbro's collar.

The rooter chief swung his arms with drum-major ferocity. "*Why, oh, why, oh, why — does it?*"

"*Oh, please, sir,*" they roared plaintively, "*we don't know*" . . . and so on to the end of the staccato dialogue for Jim Krag's benefit.

Boys and girls watched Jim Krag's homely features. If there came a twitching at a corner of his mouth, then they might expect something. The corner of his mouth twitched.

"Say it, say it!" they pleaded rapturously. "Let her come, Jim. Crush us. Oh, say it."

"Why is Ital-ee?" He abated nothing of their mimicry. "Ital-ee, my little friends, is a prize for a mountain-climbing stunt. Why are the Alps? The Alps were invented to make you want the prize. But don't ask

me," he begged them gently, "why is noise. If you notice any children around here, ask them."

Young ladies tittered. Young gentlemen grinned hopefully. They had started what they meant to start.

"But why is an iron bow-wow?" the captain of the base-ball team suddenly demanded. Following up his inspiration he shrank from the ornamental mastiff in feigned panic. "Won't he bite?"

Jim Krag's face darkened, the least unpleasantly. "No," he half growled. "It's only another noise. It's a sad noise."

This was what they needed; namely, Jim Krag's point of view. They liked to have him do their hating for them; he could do it adequately. He was a regular Saint George. He ripped the vitals out of bogies and shams that were querulous in the matter of stiffness. Exuberance began to flood in over restraint. Fairy-like toes were tingling for the dance.

"I'd like to know," said Herman Muller, a blond youth who was first violin in the high school orchestra — and while he said it he looked pointedly at the oratorical trophy clasping Jeannette's collar — "I'd like to know if Jim has gone and lost his nice, new medal already. Anybody around here happen to see it?"

Jeannette sniffed and put her chin high. With the glee of young savages they declared that she was blushing, and demanded of Jim if she wasn't. Jim's retort was already tugging for release at the corner of his mouth when he saw Bun Chubbuck in the group, and the look on Bunny's face smote him oddly. Bunny's was a round,

cherubic, freckled, serious face, with a lovably cleft chin. Bunny was staring at the medal, and it was a poignantly wistful gaze. He had issued first among the vanquished in the recent battle royal of oratory. Barring Jim Krag he would have won. But at his very climax he had lost a word, had groped for it miserably, had mired. The judges had to drop him to second place on poor delivery. Bun Chubbuck never afterward forgot that lost word. War and famine and sudden death might stampede the rest of the dictionary out of his head, but the one fatal word would still remain. The word was "supernal." With vaulting gesture and stern mien Mr. Chubbuck had meant to proclaim: " . . . of all mankind, content, that *supernal* goal!"

After the award Jim had asked him, consolingly: "For the love of Mike, Chub, why didn't you work off 'superfine' on them, and let her go at that?"

But just now Jim could not stand the poignantly wistful gaze. And yet, in what was cited as his generosity, Jim had made Bun Chubbuck commencement orator. That is, he had declined the honour for himself, and prevailed on the class to give it to Bunny.

Accordingly Jim Krag forgot that proper retort on his lips and turned abruptly from their teasing; and then it was that he encountered a pair of big blue eyes; and then it was that he recognized his little hostess, Maisie Hacklette, where she fluttered timidly on the edge of the group. These eyes, like Bunny's wistful gaze, in their turn held him. They held him because he could not help seeing the adoration in them, the hero-worshipping adoration symptomatic of Age Sweet Sixteen. There was dis-

tress in the blue eyes, too, put there by the jest coupling his name with Jeannette Chesbro's.

He was painfully embarrassed, and because of his embarrassment he was resentful. No one must know that he saw; that would convict him of the huge crime, conceit. He looked away hurriedly, as though he had not seen her at all, but Jeannette took his arm to escape their persecutors, and her pretence was none other than that he must greet his hostess. Whereupon she led him to Maisie Hacklette.

Cross as he was with Jeannette about it, he was vaguely troubled for another reason. She was only a sweet little girl of sixteen, and not of his mature generation at all, but — well, he did not know the reason, and yet he was troubled. Jim Krag was a boy. He was unaware of the subtle and troubling potency of adoration, else there would have been nothing vague about it.

He wondered only how the tiniest wave of colour swept from her brow, cheeks, and throat, like the negative of a blush.

Jeannette Chesbro took pity — as the sex will at times — on her little sister in Eve who had not the years and intuitions to shield her secret. She put an arm about Maisie's waist, and whispered in Maisie's ear that she simply must have a chance to touch a powder rag to her nose. Maisie was instantly all feminine concern and hospitality. Jeannette really did have a presentiment as to the tip of her nose. Jim's ravished kiss behind the tree box had landed just there.

The first murmuring of a guitar drew the young people into the Queen Anne house. Musicians behind rubber

plants in the sun parlour tuned themselves into accord, and burst forth inspiringly on the "Beautiful Blue Danube." Couples of boys and girls were borne away on its gentle flow. Jim Krag waited at the foot of the stairs until Jeannette joined him from above, and he passed an arm around her without a word, in the satisfying sense of understanding and comradeship. Still, he was aware of Maisie Hacklette following Jeannette down the stairs, and of a pair of big blue eyes tracing them through the maze of dancers.

He went to her for the second dance. He feared his clumsiness in etiquette, and always tried to check off this attention to hostesses as soon as possible and have it off his mind. He had no idea but that that was his sole motive now. He found her with Bun Chubbuck and her mother.

"Now, by jinks," Bunny grimly interposed, "there's nothing doing, Jim. She just gave it to me."

"The next after, then?"

"Yes," said Maisie, barely in a whisper. It had come to pass. She knew he must ask her to dance if she were hostess. She trembled, arguing she knew not what from his promptness.

Mrs. Hacklette looked on with a sour and wary smile. Jim mentally appraised her as a large and bony lady in yellow satin festooned with beads. Her lips pursed to angry contempt as she noted Maisie's confusion and its cause; for she in her turn had appraised Jim, by his sleeves worn a little shiny at the elbows, by the tightness of his first "cutaway" over his thick chest and heavy shoulders and bulging muscles. She moaned inwardly, as

was her custom, that this all came from sending one's child to the public schools. She dreaded the coming of her lord, when he should lift his brows at the mixed assembling within his gates.

The sergeant-at-arms of the class, a chubby and mirthful lass, was on Jim's arm when later he went to claim his dance with Maisie Hacklette. It did not occur to the sergeant to release him merely because he was going to find another girl. They were all communistic that way as regarded Jim Krag. Then the Philomathean president, a girl with a grave, sweet brow and mischievous black eyes, locked her arm in the sergeant's, at the same time keeping her own partner alongside. Herman Muller and Jeannette Chesbro met them, and they wheeled about and went along too, Herman laying a hand on Jim's shoulder and Jeannette pitching into the chatter at the first opening. Maisie was at the foot of the stairs, waiting, and thus beheld the first gentleman of the realm, attended by his court, coming to her, an obscure little freshman.

"Gracious!" exclaimed a girl sitting with her partner on the stairs. "Is this a ratification party for Jim Krag, or what?"

"Anyway it's not a what," retorted the Philo president.

"More silence in the gallery," cried the sergeant.

"How about flowers?" and a boy hurled a cluster of lilacs over the banisters.

"For you, Jeannette. It's a bride's bouquet."

"Now I know," shrieked the first girl. "This is the Honourable Mrs. Jim's inaugural ball."

Maisie flushed, listening, smiling, feeling lost in it all, as one who didn't belong.

"Don't laugh," protested Bun Chubbuck stoutly, "we all know that Jim is bound to be governor, and Jeannette ——"

"Listen to old Supernal!"

"Hear, hear, bless his old heart!"

"Hip, hoo-ray for the governor!"

Very callow, no doubt. And neither wise nor witty. But these fledgelings on the rim of the nest were trying to peer into the future; and it was their future, and the adult mind must be a hateful old crow indeed that would croak at them.

"Governor, eh?"

It was a man's voice; a curt, cutting voice, meant for patronizing good humour.

The mirth fell to a hush. The merrymakers turned, their laughter silenced, and suspense on their young faces. Two men had come in, and stood contemplating them within the door-way.

"Why, it's papa!" cried Maisie, running to the elder of the two. It was her first party as an almost grown-up young lady, and she wanted him to see her triumph in the quality of her guests. She eagerly took him by the hand. "These are my friends," she announced. "First, I want you to meet —— " She would have led him to Jim Krag.

"Ain't there a servant in the house?" he demanded. "Not one to take my hat? Where's your mother?"

Then they knew. The spirit of the bronze mastiff was here.

CHAPTER THREE

The Dragon on the Play Ground

YET Mr. Hacklette — Mr. F. DeL. Hacklette — intended no discourtesy to his daughter's guests. To make them a little uncomfortable, to induce the proper awed respect for the presence of the master of this house, that was all that Mr. Hacklette intended. He was glad to have them there, because he liked awed respect, and the young were impressionable. They fell before his studied pose of criticism of everything his money could provide, as though he had always been used to the best and most expensive. But guests, and least of all the young, did not willingly return. They meant neither slang nor hyperbole when they told themselves there was altogether too much *agony*.

And now Mr. Hacklette had stood under his own roof for two minutes unseen and unheralded, and no one had flinched, so busy was everybody with showering an ovation on the half-baked, homespun lump of boy over there. Mrs. Hacklette, it is true, was hurrying to him to take his hat and the hat of the young man who accompanied him, and while the mere children gazed, he stood removing his kid gloves, curt and quiet and severely dignified. He was a middle-aged, tailor-smart type of business man. His high-bridged nose had

on a time suffered a fracture, and that just at the point to give the effect of stern hauteur, forcing him to focus his eyes beyond at a high level. His "tooth-brush" fashion of moustache was mixed with gray bristles and was cropped to the line of the short upper lip. He bit off his words much as he did a strand of moustache caught between his teeth.

"Governor, eh? If the governor can wait, May, suppose you shake hands with Mr. Sa-vedge here, who I brought along to look in on your party."

He tainted the name with a French accent, though Mr. Savedge himself, the young man whom he had brought along, did not. Mr. Savedge was a young lawyer, rising, and he was one of *the* Savedges. The Savedges were an institution of that adolescent Western metropolis. They were often in the newspapers. Necessarily, for they were a part of the news. They subscribed to municipal bond issues. Every few summers they went to Atlantic City. Once they went "abroad." They were one of the nineteen or twenty first families. Old Judge Savedge, as solid as a Roman senator, had been on the school board for twenty years. The Savedges could be described as "established." The English ivy on their home had climbed almost to the eaves. Young Mr. Savedge had found favour, which he valued not in the slightest, in the eyes of Mr. Hacklette. Mr. Hacklette, who was in "Real Estate & Loans" and obscurely reputed to be making money, had taken his law business to the Savedges, which also was not valued in the slightest. "Brought along" is not exact. Mr. Hacklette had dragged Mr. Savedge along. In Mr. Savedge's honour,

and if Mr. Savedge was to be impressed, Mr. Hacklette needed to be especially curt and fault-finding.

Maisie gave her hand to Mr. Savedge. She did it much as an obedient child who is called from play to greet an older guest. Her father surveyed them both over his high, broken nose, as stern as a field-marshal on horseback. Abruptly his teeth snapped on a ragged bristle end. In effect he had snapped at Maisie. The little goose was not sufficiently aware of Mr. Savedge. Her mind was somewhere else.

"Here, May, you hurry up them fiddlers, and dance this with Mr. Sa-vedge. I don't guess he knows any of your little friends."

"Little?" — Dignified misses tilted their chins. Indignant young men reddened down to their collar buttons.

"But, papa," Maisie faltered, "this next dance, I have it engaged. I —— "

"It's mine," said Jim Krag, discovering that the dance with her was a thing he greatly desired. He spoke more bluntly than he thought. He did not like Mr. Hacklette's kid gloves. He did not like Mr. Hacklette. Something antipathetic in the man set him on edge.

Maisie nodded earnestly.

"Eh — oh, with our future governor, eh?" Mr. Hacklette examined the gnarled hickory knot of boyhood confronting him. He wanted to see this snag that caught into a sudden and passionate plan of his concerning Mr. Savedge of *the* Savedges and his sixteen-year-old child of a daughter. He was the more exasperated

because the snag was a homespun stripe of boy. The bully in him raged against the restraint imposed by the modern drawing-room.

Mr. Savedge for his part was struck by the level look in the boy's gray eyes. "Whew," he thought, "here's a sturdy man-child that can be vindictive. Case of *eave canem* all right."

"See here, Jimmy," chided the girl of the grave brow and mischievous black eyes, "wasn't this to be our dance? Seems to me the Philo president should claim *some* precedence in the sight of the mighty."

A half smile twisted Jim's mouth. He understood. A loyal comrade was bolstering up his dance market. And two black eyes were taunting the dragon come among them.

"No, Alice, you're mixed." He rallied her as he would a sister. "You have the fourth, fifth, and sixth. This next is the third, and I have it with Miss Hacklette." He crooked his arm toward Miss Hacklette, and Miss Hacklette took it as she would something about to be lost.

The black eyes sparkled approvingly. "All right for you, Jim Krag!"

"Eh — what?" stammered Mr. Hacklette. "What name? — Krag! — Surely — no, surely it ain't little Yellow Jaunders?" The hard light of power came into his eyes even as he relaxed, expanded. His change of manner was like the sudden stopping of machinery. "Look-a-here, Tildie." This was a morsel of joviality bitten off and flung to Mrs. Hacklette. "Look close. Remember him? Course you do. It's the same owlish,

saffron-mugged little bra — bruiser — that used to clutter around his mammy's skirts when she" — Mr. Hacklette smiled, while his eyes grew harder — "when she would come to do your sewing, Tildie. Cain't reach that far back, I guess. Eh, Master Jimmy?"

"No," said Jim, drawing away, "I don't remember."

"Oh, no," said Mr. Hacklette, "but I'd bet your mother would."

None could say that the least offence lurked beneath the affable conversation-making, yet the boy's cheek-bones were splotched rust-red. His mates, too, were sobered and waiting tensely, sensing menace to one of the pack. Instinct, peculiarly the monitor of the young animal, was clairvoyant. Maisie herself was half panting in vague excitation, with eyes raised beseechingly to her father.

"Probably you've never heard," said Jim, nervously pushing his cuffs up the short sleeves of his coat, "that my mother is dead."

She had died only during the year. She could not stay even to see her boy win the oratory medal. She knew that the medal was to be won. He and she had made quite a point of that. With the patient, plodding calculation characteristic of him, he had settled on the medal as the climax of his high school career, and during three years she had watched him moving tirelessly toward it. She knew how disappointed Jim would be if she were not there to share in the glow and tingle of triumph, as she had shared in the arduous waiting. She tried very hard not to go before then, and each day resolutely put off the merciful call.

But the Angel lost patience at last, and struck her down.

A small insurance, kept up by the toil of her fingers and the squandering of eyesight, and Jim's vacation earnings, would, she knew, line her grave with flowers and see him through to his diploma. For the rest, she had no misgivings; Jim was a boy who could take care of himself.

So much, and of his father's early death, Jim Krag knew, for his mother had told him. Through their years together, he had seen her — it seemed always he had seen her — working with her fingers and paying out life. Ceaselessly the precious fluid had run along the thread and off the needle's point into exquisite fabrics. This also he knew. But he had never heard her utter the name of Hacklette.

"Eh — too bad — poor woman!" Mr. Hacklette snipped off that shred of sympathy. "Sure, too bad, for I'd bet she'd remember. Wouldn't she, Tildie?"

Mrs. Hacklette smiled hurriedly, and murmured "Yes."

"I wish you'd be plain, sir," said Jim.

Mr. Hacklette's short upper lip warped to his teeth. He was ready. The sewing woman's kid was really going to dance with Maisie, was he? And despite the bringing along of Mr. Savedge? "Plain?" he repeated. "Why, where's the harm in being glad to see you again, when we used to be neighbours on et?"

"Of course," Mrs. Hacklette carefully interjected, "that was before we went and built out here in the South End, you know."

Mr. Hacklette frowned. They should distinguish be-

tween him and Tildie. The South End did not puff *him* up, they could see that.

"Well, well," he said, having thus taken care of Tildie's interruption, "it's a curious world. Here's a dozen years slipped by, and here's little Yellow Jaunders again, and it don't seem yesterday since his mammy and him came to do —our washing, wasn't it, Tildie?"

"Papa!" It was Maisie's cry, hurt and protesting. Her shrinking was pictured on all the young faces. The World, a monster, had broken in on Childhood, scattering the happy sojourners there, maiming their leader, frightening them out of their pretty country.

Maisie had turned to Jim Krag, as one does involuntarily to note how a fellow-creature takes a blow. The look on his face made her throb with compassion. Yet she drew back from the look on his face, and could not tell why.

Another girl — not Jeannette, but Alice — moved between them, and laid her hand on his arm.

"What can it matter, Jim?" she said softly. "What difference —— "

"None, if — it was true," he stammered. "Mother would have told me —— "

"Not true?" Mr. Hacklette's brows twitched upward. "Tildie, not true?"

"Sakes alive," protested Mrs. Hacklette, "don't I mind me that last time him and the poor woman was in our house? I'd just given her a snack of something to carry home when —— "

"Tildie!" Mr. Hacklette was shocked. One should not mention one's deeds of charity. Beside, his voluble

lady had said precisely enough. It would be as well not to recall all of that episode. He would not recall how he had come from his shabby office to his shabby home on the day in question, and met Jimmy's tired mother with her baby coming out; how he had put out his hand for the paper sack in Mrs. Krag's hand; and how he had thrust his high-bridged nose therein.

The sack held a bunch of over-ripe grapes. Mrs. Hacklette had gratefully pressed them on Mrs. Krag. The "Boom" had not happened as yet, and Mr. Hacklette had not as yet manipulated options on corn fields checkerboarded into city lots. And Maisie had only just arrived. Mrs. Krag, coming in to help on Maisie's scant baby trousseau, had found poor Matilda Hacklette half fainting over a tub of hot suds. The Hacklette wash-day needed to be frequent in that era. Setting Jimmy on the floor with a yellow soda biscuit, Mrs. Krag sent Mrs. Hacklette to bed, and replaced her at the tub.

Now munching a yellow soda biscuit soon palled on little Jimmy, and he was for exploring the unfamiliar and squalid kitchen. Mrs. Krag looked about her with a mother's quick expediency. She had instant need of two things, brightness and noise. She snatched a tin pie plate from a shelf, and a spoon of German silver from the cupboard. These she laid on the floor beside the restless toddler, and let him work out the combination for himself.

When Mr. Hacklette held the sack between his fingers and thrust his nose therein, he perceived a brightness among the grapes. His instinct was keen for that which

shines. Between thumb and forefinger he brought forth the spoon of German silver. Little Jimmy had smuggled his drumstick into the sack.

Mr. Hacklette's brows arched as he dangled the accusing spoon in air. But he saw only Jimmy's scowling face over his mother's shoulder. The charitable widow was hastening from that house. For her the Hacklettes never existed afterward.

The half truth! Jim Krag, surrounded by his little world, took the blade into his flesh, standing. His pride of a poor boy was the rawest pulp in any case, and in his sensitiveness Hacklette's mean, ingrate half truth concerning the family's washing might almost have touched his mother's honour. At least, it lacked only that. He was the more helpless. He could not assume offence. The cruel, skilful manner of his humiliation left him no retort. But the vindictive germ in him was multiplying, seething, vitiating his being. In unreasoning, sullen fury — and the man's smile goading the boy to it — he blurted out choking syllables. "Unfair . . . cowardly" . . . These were among them.

Mr. Hacklette turned to the others in grieved surprise, as though to ask what low rowdy was this that they had brought to outrage his hospitality.

"Oh, well, you're your mammy's own unmannerly whelp, I see," he said resignedly. The boy caught his breath and the man quickly raised his hand to stem another torrent. Like acid dropping on a wound, his words fell: "Now, that's enough, sir. Stop, that's enough out of you. Your young friends don't know,

I guess, that I caught her sneaking off some of our silverware that day."

On the haze of young faces and bright lights and flowers of spring, while mandolins and guitars tinkled promise of the dance, the boy stared dumbly. The faces all seemed oddly white, and were of one blank expression. To his blurred vision they weaved up and down, like faces chalked on an agitated canvas, yet ever afterward they were as ston in his memory. Ever afterward h could close his eyes, and they were there, the blank faces of his little world. There was no help in them. One — Maisie's — was ghastly white, ghastly and haggard in its pity, and fascinated him. He no more saw the others. He saw horror grow in her eyes and fill them utterly. He wondered, not knowing that the distorting change over his own features was the cause.

The change in him came with the clearing of his brain. Now he could state to himself the situation in cold, concise, merciless terms. His mother had been called a thief! He realized, coldly, clearly, his responsibility Only, how best to do it — how — how ——

He believed afterward that he was edging in toward Hacklette's throat, seeing only that, when a shriek— a shriek that turned blood to ice,—held him where he was, and his tense, curled fingers went limp. There were other shrieks, in hysterical sympathy. Some of the girls began to cry. He saw Maisie falling, her eyelids fluttering and closing. Bun Chubbuck caught her, awkward Bun Chubbuck, his face scared and drawn in anguish, and let her down to the floor as tenderly as a prince of angels.

Her mother was on her knees instantly beside her,

moaning, blowing into her face, chafing her wrists, while the festoons of beads jingled.

"Doctor Oliver! she cried frantically." "Oh, quick, quick, phone for Doctor Oliver!"

Jim Krag thought at first that Maisie had fainted. But as he looked on the waxen, death-like face, he began to tremble. The impulse rose in him to snatch her up, to struggle with her back to life. The impulse was pain. But how best to do it — how — how? Again, he did not know.

"It's only her heart," said Hacklette to young Savedge, returning from the telephone. "She gets 'em, these attacks."

The mother looked up in stricken appeal. "Oh, isn't the doctor coming? Isn't . . . "

Gazing down fixedly on the girl's lifeless face, Jim Krag decided in the moment what his career was to be. In the moment, at their little senior party on the threshold of destiny, his goal had changed. Beyond the Alps lay . . . rapine!

CHAPTER FOUR

The Medal Winner

THERE was a rush of red letter days to the end of the school calendar. With class days, field days, contests, parties, then commencement, then the alumni picnic, it was a sunburst of the golden hours. These events were the punctuation marks that closed the lesson. The text being youth, they were exclamation points.

How any mortal boy or girl, duly qualified by four years of work for this season of glory, could miss the feast was inconceivable. Yet commencement, the climax, was only a few days off, and Jim Krag no more came to school. He had dropped out, he had vanished. No one had seen him since the Hacklette party.

Jeannette could tell them nothing. Jim had not spoken, taking her home that night, except to ask her for his medal and mutter "Good-bye," without, explained Jeannette, even shaking hands.

"It — his just thinking, thinking, all the time — was downright creepy," said Jeannette. "It was like a — you know, like a blood-curdler going on in the dark, which you can't see, but which you can *feel.*"

"Just the same," said Alice, "we want him at commencement. Oh, those horrid Hacklettes; except Maisie of course!"

She and the sergeant-at-arms had already obtained Jim's address at the office, and were going out there at the noon hour. The rooter chief humbly applied to join them as a deputy, and the little chubby sergeant, in demure contempt for his brawn, finally said he might. But she ignored him elaborately all the way there.

Jim made his home with three spinster aunts, dress-makers, who lived in a little frame house. There was a weather-worn porch brightly screened by morning glories. The aunts did not even know that Jim had stopped school. He was never a talkative lad, they said. He didn't expect his hard-working aunts to be eagerly interested in his lessons and games, so he almost never spoke of his little affairs. He just came and went, and was so good and quiet about the house. Poor, lonely boy! They knew he grieved for his mother. He hadn't what might be called a real companion since she died. "Ah, dearie, life is cruel!" said these dress-makers behind the weather-worn porch where morning glories clambered.

"But," Alice interrupted gently, "commencement is Friday, you know."

"Commencement? Ah, yes, that must be it," said one of the old ladies. Yes, for Jimmy had seemed busier than usual the last few days, getting his own breakfast before they were up and coming home late, after they were in bed. Did the young lady suppose the — commencement, was it — was the reason?

Alice shook her head. So their expedition had only deepened the mystery.

"I'll bet Jim has gone to work," declared the rooter chief, as they started back.

"And miss commencement?" objected the sergeant.

"Why not? You girls can't get it into your heads there's nothing left of school now but the flourishes. Just flourishes, and Jim —— "

" —— can't wait for flourishes," said Alice.

"Not him, Alice, and," added the rooter enviously, "here he's gone and got a week's start on the rest of us in the real business of life. I wonder whose law office he's in."

Wherever Jim was, when two thousand and some hundred fathers and mothers and available kin thronged into the high school auditorium for commencement, Jim's mind was not occupied with that event. He had paused long enough during the morning to mail a small package in care of the committee on flowers, whereupon his thoughts surged back on a larger matter that now enslaved his existence.

Commencement was Bun Chubbuck's triumph. Bunny delivered the class oration. Each premeditated sound rolled off his tongue in exactly the right sequence. This was the more to his credit, because constantly and valiantly he had to hold back the word "supernal," which was ever trying to crowd through and slip off into the infinity of space and posterity.

When, cherubic and stern, Mr. Chubbuck laid on the last solemn marvel of effective sound to his critique of the universe, the universe in front of him and his classmates behind him burst forth roundly, affectionately, in a huge salvo of applause. The artistry of vocalization had made them tingle. They trusted Bunny for it that whatever he had said warranted a tingling. He sat down,

flushed and glowing, just a human boy again. He searched the blur of faces in front for a pair of blue eyes. Maisie Hacklette was out there somewhere. He did not find the blue eyes, but she was out there, and she had seen him, had heard him, had witnessed his moment of triumph. Surely, this was compensation for the loss of the oratory medal. He thrilled in gratitude to Jim Krag who had given him the chance, who had made him class orator rather than take the honour for himself.

And now the flowers were coming. Enormous bouquets were being handed up over the heads of the school orchestra. This present onslaught was Bunny's quota, from his father and mother and Cousin Phemie, still applauding in the fifth row back. Then came a little package. A watch? No doubt, since Uncle Alec could not be aught but rich and benevolent, he being down in Sonora where all the world was a silver mine. At the moment, however, Uncle Alec down in Sonora was thinking of passing dividends, and there was no watch in the little package. Bunny, when he opened it, turned as red as fifty beets and snapped the casket shut again before any one could see. Yet, in a flame of golden lettering, he had read his own name. The little package contained the oratory medal.

Only when alone that night in his room did he open the box again, and saw the n te Jim Krag had sent with it.

"Melt the thing down, Chub" (he read), "into a nugget of experience. Consider also the ant, Bunny boy. One bundle and one destination are enough for the ant. He doesn't try to arrive at two places at the same time. But he does land the bundle. Also your Uncle Jimmy. *He* landed the medal.

Oratory wasn't his kind of road, either. He stammered and stumbled and barked his shins. But he had decided that he had to have the medal. If it had been for logarithms, or millinery, or peeling potatoes, or playing bean bag, he'd have gone after it just the same.

"Now, you, Chubby, had been a speechful wonder even in the ward schools. You had wee Jimmy beaten a thousand octaves and a windmill full of gestures. You don't know it, but it was a four years' campaign for Jimmy. And even then you'd have won. But take your unabridged, Bunny, and if you read deep enough, you'll come on a certain little word. The certain little word is *Supernal.* One needs time, though, to reach the *S's,* and meantime the bull pup passed the rabbit and snatched off the persimmon.

"Do you guess now why I backed you for class orator? Two bundles, Bunny! I loaded you up with the second one. And you wobbled, and dropped one of them. I'm sorry, Chub. I found, after I got the medal, that I didn't want it. You take it. I can, by patient industry, probably gather up enough remorse without having the memory of the way you looked at this trinket the other night. Besides, as a nugget, Bunny dear, it ought to be worth more to you than a rich uncle's legacy. And if you don't mind, won't you forgive me the second bundle?

"J. K."

Bunny stared at the note. Strident, mocking laughter seemed to jangle in his ears.

"I suppose it's what Jim would call a 'supernal' josh," he mused lugubriously.

CHAPTER FIVE

A Young Physician's First Adventure

THREE years from that spring, after—as one may say — three years' toil in forging deadly weapons, Jim Krag stirred again into the world. Very curiously, it was into precisely the same little world from which he had vanished.

Work, because of the ruthless Krag manner of working, had created James Krag, M. D., a young man of a degree and of stone. Jimmy Krag had not gone into the law then! The morning following the Hacklette party he looked up Doctor Oliver, the Hacklettes' family physician, in the city directory, and thirty-five minutes later he was telling that benevolent practitioner that he wanted to enter his office and study medicine. Doctor Oliver had to wrinkle his brows with severity in order to focus eyesight and judgment, so that it took him a minute to say yes.

"I will take out enough life insurance to secure you, until I pay it back, for any expenses I may have to ask you for at the medical college," Jim explained, "and I will do my studying here, so as to learn what you will let me learn from you and at the same time be of any use to you that I can. But," he added, "I don't want to bind myself after I get my degree. I must be free to leave this town any time afterward."

Doctor Oliver was content. He would not stand in the way of a young friend's best interests.

"They won't be my best interests," said Jim. Doctor Oliver felt that he said it the least bit sullenly.

The three years followed, day after day, hour after hour, each hour being of sixty pregnant minutes. A heart beat is infinity enough for an eternal thought, whereupon eternity begins.

But the young student rather contemptuously regarded himself as a plumber's apprentice. He worked in yards of piping that were clogged with useless mortality to make us rot before our time, as though we were yet as wolves and devoured raw the flesh of our food.

Revolting thoughts were these, and a scavenger's leer, for the blessed art of healing!

In the anatomical laboratory, with wide forearms bared, he worked. He would lift a hair-like nerve from its ghastly mass with the delicate precision of a watchmaker or a woman, and as he worked a sneer grew on his lips. But he worked with greedy intensity. It might have been gluttony before an unclean feast. His passion was the heart and the brain, the blood and the nerves. He came to despise man's science because of the secrets that the heart and the brain yet withheld from mankind.

Jim still lived with his dress-making aunts. The little they needed from him, he gave. This he earned by proof-reading on the *Morning News*. Except on lecture nights, he read proof until two in the morning. Then he walked home, and slept four hours. Sunday mornings he slept through ten hours. Each week day, from eight in the morning until half past six at night, he devoted to the

study of medicine, in Doctor Oliver's office, in the college laboratories and lecture rooms, at clinics and Saint Margaret's hospital. He went nowhere, he saw no one, unless in this routine. He did not smoke. He did not drink. Almost, he never laughed. He read no papers, no books, no letters, except again as his daily routine exacted. His communication with life and the world and joy was a dead wire.

Now, however, he was going forth to a merrymaking. He was going to the annual alumni picnic on Cleft Rock for that year's high school graduating class.

The morning sun juggled dancing motes before his dulled gray eyes, which were used to the lamp. Carefree laughter roused his mind to the activity of rest, after gore-stained books and labour in dead things. Piquant beauty, shy glances, girlish forms, a ravishing ankle revealed and seen no more, these troubled his senses, wedded to sexless science. Colour, sound, flesh, the stirring of spring, flowers, trees, birds singing, the clear lake, distant mountains, the sky and fleecy clouds, bracing air, subtle longing, enchantment, exaltation, illusion, delusion — Nature — confused his being, which had trafficked so long in drab facts, bartering the minutes for truth.

When he closed his aunts' door behind him, and stepped from the weather-worn porch to the street, it was as a tired mechanic. The work was done, three years of it. But he was too wearied — to the fibre of his soul he was weary — for the labourer's restful relaxation in the quiet sunshine of a holiday. Yet he did know the labourer's hardly-earned feeling of satisfaction because of the work

done. He might have been going forth to receive his wage. His mind's eye was set on the vanishing point, and the expression of his face was dark and resolute. Nevertheless, he was going to a young people's picnic.

Carrying a canvas telescope valise, he swung on the running board of a cable car with the nonchalant ease of a brakeman. The action in its heavy grace proclaimed that here was no futility. Down town he transferred to a Lake car, already partly filled with picnickers on their way to the boat at the foot of Main Street. There were girls in crisp white, their escorts in duck or flannels, with baskets, rugs, and shawls.

Krag's sombre figure and canvas telescope did not accord with the scene. None of the picnickers on the car recognized him. It did not occur to them to look at him closely, nor that he could be one of themselves. He was equally oblivious of them. He was oblivious of the contrast he suffered beside natty youth. The hardening armour of his personality made him tolerant of differences in apparel. Nonconformity no longer troubled him.

The car stopped half-way round the loop at the lake front, and the picnickers climbed off with their baskets, hurrying aboard a little excursion steam-boat and gaily exchanging greetings with other picnickers at the rail. Going up the crowded gang-plank, Krag heard his name in a burst of reproachful surprise.

"Sakes alive, Jimmy Krag!"

It stripped off the years like a cloak, embarrassing him. Over his shoulder, he saw a chubby, chatty, mirthful young matron. "If it isn't the sergeant," he murmured.

"Oh, Jim, wake up!" cried she. "You're way off the almanac, and that was ages ago. I'm only chaperon now."

"Chaperon?" He must get his mind on this. The compact little sergeant-at-arms was already rotund. She was a ripening peach. "Chaperon?" he repeated.

"Why not?" she retorted. "Archie!" she called to some one ahead. "I declare, if that boy is *trying* to lose me —— "

The boy in demand turned. He carried a hamper on one shoulder, a shopping bag on his wrist, opera-glasses over a finger, a bear rug and two Navajo blankets under an arm, and his pockets bulged with veils, gloves, scarfs, vanity bags, and handkerchiefs. Krag in bewilderment perceived that it was the rooter chief.

"You took *him?*" he protested. "Why, you were always fighting."

"And are yet," said the sergeant. "Archie, you're clogging up the ship. *Please* help me on this boat. You *know* I'm out of breath. Oh, dear, you're right, Jim, I shouldn't have done it. Wait, Archie's tie is round under one ear again. Hold still a *minute!*"

Jim followed them dumbly.

"Now then — questions," said the sergeant, having led to camp-stools in the lee of the pilot house. "And stacks of 'em. Jim Krag, what have you been doing with yourself?"

Others wanted to know, too, as word passed over the deck that Jim Krag had bobbed up to the surface of the world again and was on that very boat. They gathered round and welcomed him back. Yet back to what? They began to know the feeling that handshakes and

exclamations may not gloze over the truth that a reunion is never a reunion. Quite simply, the past could not be the present, and the past was an absent member. After three years only, Jim's class could not muster a dozen at the alumni picnic. And the short dozen, present in the flesh, were yet not wholly there. Each met in the other a partial stranger. Each had brought an intruder to the reunion. They spoke of the totally absent, who also would have been partial strangers.

"Alice is a junior at Vassar now," said one. "She won't be home till June."

"And Jeannette," said the clumsy rooter chief, while others stole glances at Krag, "Jeannette's married, and moved to California."

Krag did not hear. He was peering down at the wharf, scanning each new comer. He had received an invitation to Jeannette's wedding, and laid it aside among the reagent bottles on his laboratory table. The man was some California mining man, and wealthy, no doubt. Jim had forgotten the name, and never did remember it.

The sergeant hastened to mention Bun Chubbuck. Bun had floated away to Mexico; had an uncle down there.

"Before he went, though," said Herman Muller, on a time first violin, now clerk in Siegler's cigar store, "he made a dead-set for Maisie Hacklette. Suppose he's hunting a fortune to match her dad's. The old hedgehog!"

And so it went — reminiscences — fitting a glass case over withered blossoms.

The stubby little steam-boat let forth a querulous blast. Girls shrieked, and everybody stirred. There

was a rush to the rail to hurry up those who might be left behind, as though the whistle were not perfectly audible on the wharf.

Jim Krag's tired gray eyes focused in acute attention. Two girls and a man were leaving an open carriage drawn up near the gang-plank. One of the girls — and the gray eyes leaped to flame — was flesh and form and breath, a promise, a lure, mystery, the soul's warmth, and man's rebellion against bleak loneliness — a mate!

The other girl? Krag did not see the other girl. He saw the one girl pinch up her skirts in both hands, like a Versailles milkmaid courtesying in the minuet; saw her come swarming prettily towards the boat, her two feet twinkling; saw a picture hat, as in running she tucked down her chin; the curve and the nape of her white neck; and two brown girlish curls fluttering on her breast; and slenderness and sweet grace in fairy blue; and a vibrant, joyous being. And he thought he saw happiness.

But over his face came another expression. It was not pain, but more terrible than pain, and itself terrifying. It was the power of will, flowing lava hot; and desire was embedded there.

Yet he asked: "Who is she? Who —— "

Then the astounding happened, and swept the other look, the look of renunciation, from his face. At the foot of the gang-plank she glanced up, her eyes racing eagerly from one to another of those looking down, her red lips smiling and laughing for those she knew, and her gaze sped at last to Jim Krag. Her hand snatched at one of the curls on her breast.

She was Maisie Hacklette.

CHAPTER SIX

The Sequel in the Skillet

A GROANING of timbers, a lapping of waters, and the little stern wheeler began to nose her way over the lake. The holiday makers roamed the deck. Groups melted into other groups. Everybody wanted to exhaust the reunion's capacity for surprise. The very next face beaming one's way might be of yet another old school-fellow lost since ranks broke at graduation.

Jim Krag stayed where he was. Indeed, where he became headquarters for the short dozen of his class. He stayed, waiting for a pair of large blue eyes. Calculation iced over fever and throbbing. If human hearts were a commodity, she would bring hers to him, shyly. If like a thug he clutched for it, she would flee, trembling in the sudden knowledge that she possessed one. Awakened instinct would hide it for her, to make it the more desired.

"Heigh-o," cried the sergeant, "there's Maisie Hacklette. Isn't she the young lady, though, the delicious dear? Maisie! Oh, Maisie! Does any one suppose she has gone deaf?"

Maisie was passing the pilot house, chatting vivaciously with the man and the other girl. She did not see the

pilot house. She was unaware of pilot houses. Yet the cheek toward the pilot house burned. She felt it burning. Her high spirits hurried her on, and she hurried on her two companions. But the other girl's ears and eyes were better than Maisie's. She looked round, hearing Maisie's name, and caught Maisie's arm. Then Maisie *had* to look. She saw only the sergeant. She was tremendously surprised and delighted, and she ran up and kissed the sergeant. Her animation rose. So also did the traitress shell pink in her cheeks.

When she paused for breath, the sergeant wanted to present the ignored Archie and the ignored Doctor Krag. And now that the huge creatures were visible, Maisie declared, oh, but she knew them already, and wasn't it just fine, meeting old friends again this way, and — and, oh, how horrid of her! — Miss Sommerville — and Mr. Savedge.

Still she had not actually looked at Krag. Her lashes were long, and as a veil they were adequate.

Miss Sommerville protested that she, Miss Sommerville, needed no introduction. She remembered them all *so* well. From her freshman year, wasn't it? Yes, she was a freshman with Maisie, when they were haughty seniors, so of course they didn't know her, *then*. But she'd grown into a senior, too, and as she was class poetess — with a yellow ribbon around the poem — she hoped they must know, *now*, who *she* was . . . It was apparent that Miss Sommerville had a long tongue. Her high-keyed inflection made them feel that it was a catty tongue.

For Mr. Savedge, of *the* Savedges, there were likewise a few adjusting words. They all had met him before.

He conceded, amiably, that he had met them. He wore cool flannels and white canvas shoes, glasses and a panama. He had an alert air of gentlemanly, affable composure. Mr. Savedge was already being mentioned for the legislature.

Miss Sommerville, talking or not talking, was taking her bearings. She had a sharp nose, which was her despair. It was also her character. At present she was a sweet girl graduate, and she was not unmindful of the strategic advantages of that condition. Her pride was her straw-coloured hair, but she was competent. What might there be, thought Miss Sommerville, in this group for Miss Sommerville? She shot a quick glance at Mr. Savedge. Wherefore, effusively, she began to lionize Jim Krag.

"Mr. — oh, Doc-tor — Krag, then you really are here at our picnic — *nuss-pas?*"

Jim's lips twitched. "You've noticed it?"

"But Doctor Oliver was saying to Maisie — you remember, Maisie dear, yesterday when he said you simply must not risk this picnic after all the agitation you've had graduating? — as I was saying, Doctor, Doctor Oliver was telling Maisie *how* amazed he was at this sudden notion of yours for picnics, seeing that you *never* went out *anywhere*. How *per*-fectly honoured we all are! Maisie —— "

"Should obey her physician," said Krag.

And as Mr. Savedge was regarding Maisie with eyes full of question, Miss Sommerville was content. Maisie, she knew, had declined Mr. Savedge's invitation to the picnic, because of Doctor Oliver's warning. Miss Sommer-

ville knew also, and this she wanted Mr. Savedge to know, that Maisie's later acceptance of the invitation had followed Doctor Oliver's gossip about his young assistant's sudden notion for picnics. Mr. Savedge meantime had asked to take Miss Sommerville. Then, he had brought both girls. Miss Sommerville was not without spunk, but she could discern when spunk might not avail. Mr. Savedge would gladly have released her, and taken Maisie alone.

Being an amateur in emotion, the feminine mind has an instinct for sequels. One evening long ago, an evening of painful festivity, Maisie Hacklette had suffered an attack of heart failure because of a very ugly scene between her father and this Jim Krag. Maisie and Jim Krag had not met since, until the present moment. Miss Sommerville was good at surmising. Each had sought the present meeting. The sequel was in the skillet. And Miss Sommerville kindly poked the fire.

The caldron astern had slacked to a clear, bubbling wake. Over the water were foot-hills, the verdure of them spotted royal purple by wild flowers. Farther beyond a snow-crested range was dazzling in the heavens. This range was the summit of things, far away and alluring. The newly fledged graduates took that metaphor to their souls with the air of spring into their lungs. But Miss Sommerville spoiled it.

"Isn't it *per*-fectly beautiful!" she cried.

Nor would she be be denied. Her yellow eyes turned up beseechingly to Krag. "Isn't it *per*-fectly beautiful?"

"What is?" Krag asked absently.

"Why, you know" — her thin-fingered hand encompassed the solar system — "everything."

Krag shook himself from his abstraction like a wet bear. "Is it? Why?"

The class poetess winced. But he would not let her off. "Why is it?"

Maisie stared. Even Mr. Savedge stirred in appreciation.

"Because," protested the cornered girl, "oh, because it's the spring-tide, and the flower-time, and, and — oh, when everything is simply bursting into life. *You* know."

"And *glad* to be alive," said Maisie; of which she herself was the proof, budding, filling out, throbbing. Krag's level gaze went to her, and was held by her, while she spoke. But the bear had not forgotten the poetess. Since they forced him to small talk, they should have it.

"Why not wait till November," he asked, "and see then which of your beautiful things have gorged on your other beautiful things?"

"Jim Krag!" gasped the chubby sergeant.

"Your spring-time," he went on, his mouth twisting in a hard way that was not like the old humorous way, "is nature's vulgarity. It's the greedy time; the gaudy time; the grafting, clinging, sucking, strangling time. Glad to be alive? Sure. But not glad that anything else is alive."

"Oh, you're hateful," Maisie half sobbed.

"But the flowers," cried Miss Sommerville, "think of the dear flowers!"

"And their snake-like roots, choking each other. I say, let's wait till fall, when Nature is tired and humbled. Then, if we must rave, there are the dear weeds."

"Don't, Jim," pleaded the sergeant. "Surely you don't mean you respect the persistence of evil?"

"Why evil?" he demanded. "Just because weeds don't happpen to be wanted by some other living order, just because *we* don't want 'em — oh, pshaw! Mrs. Archie, what do you suppose *you* are, from the weed point of view?"

The sergeant stamped her foot. "Weeds *are* evil, Jim!"

"Until we find one good for something, like the tomato. Then we cuddle it, and keep the rest of the vegetable kingdom off it, and the animal kingdom too, except ourselves. What respect can anybody have for a tomato any more? Here, Maisie," he said abruptly, "let's you and I go aft and watch the bubbles."

Maisie looked at him, startled. But she put her hand on his arm and went with him. Her animation had left her, and she was very sedate, but inside, all that there was of her tingled and danced.

CHAPTER SEVEN

Playing to Shudders

ON CLEFT ROCK the one spot for a picnic was across the cleft. The Rock was a spruce and pine little island jutting up out of the lake. One side rose sheer out of the water, a bleak precipice a hundred feet high, splotched a terra cotta red. Across this highest part the island was split cleanly and fearfully in twain, from the summit down to the lake. A rustic bridge spanned the narrow cañon thus formed. On the other side Cleft Rock fell away to the shore, like a sugar-loaf melting in a saucer of water. The boat made her landing on this side. Bow and stern ropes were carried to stumps, and the picnickers clattered down the gang-plank.

A russet trail under the pines, carpeted with cones and needles, wound upward to the cleft. Girls needed help over the steep places, a breathing spell in the cool nooks, and a drink at the spring half way up. They required columbines, and screamed for help when the dainty red blossoms hung just out of reach. Young men carried the baskets, with a lessening respect for their fine young strength.

The trail was as a legend, trod by one generation, and so saved to the next. The first picnickers had it from the

pioneers. The pioneers had it from the Indians. The Indians, being pursued, had landed on Cleft Rock from their canoes, and rained arrows from the summit. The little path in the little wilderness was a symbol. It was an epic of the pioneers.

Crossing the twenty feet of rustic bridge that spanned the cleft, girls would peer over the rail into the gloomy fissure, and exult in delicious shivers of fright. Boys leaped up and down, to make the bridge sway.

"I wouldn't," said Krag, turning round on them.

"Isn't it safe, really?"

"Maybe not that safe," said Krag.

He stepped aside, to let Maisie hasten off the bridge. She had turned white, and he noted her sensitiveness at any suggestion of horror. Her being was as simple for him as a key-board. No one would have trusted the hard half-smile on his lips, and yet there was a rapt tenderness there that would have puzzled even himself.

On the precipice side of the cleft a trapper's abandoned cabin offered a splendid place for cookery, and, if necessary, for shelter. It was of logs, with a door and window, and a fireplace of blackened rock, and a kettle hanging by a chain over the hearth. Under the trees outside, near the precipice but not too near, one contemplated the lake down below, and the foot-hills beyond, and the snow-clads far away, and indolently accepted Nature's pain of world-birth at par with the flavour of a briar pipe.

The morning passed, the feast from the baskets had been spread and joyously wrecked, and the lazier ones, a score or more, still lounged on rugs and blankets under

the pines, indulging the sense of being well fed and of the placid grandeur of the view. The others were scattered over the island, exploring, gathering wild flowers, blazing away at pine cones with six-shooters, and plaguing the echoes with their shouts and laughter.

But these lazier ones on their rugs were Krag's audience, though Krag had a word only now and then and seemed the drowsiest of them all. Yet he played to shudders, deliberately. It was already late in the afternoon, and the best hour on the Rock. The sun glorified the white crest of mountains and the hills were mirrored in the lake. This calmer splendour held a prophecy of gloom, when the wild beauty of the wilderness must darken to the sombre, and, because it is grandeur, be subtly appalling. The *feel* of this coming on, as Krag knew, may be inexplicably dreadful, like ghostly forms imagined in the twilight, while the actual black consummation of night is not so dreadful after all.

Krag wondered idly how high the Rock really was, which gave to a venturesome youth, not unmindful of the girls there to see him, the idea of trying to measure the dizzy fall with his eye. He ran to the edge, circled a sapling with his arm, and leaned far over the cliff, looking down. His head swam. He pulled himself back. They saw how pale he was, and laughed.

"I tell you," he cried, to turn their thoughts from him quickly, "this old rock would have been pie for William Tell and them fellows."

"Those fellows, Ben," chided Miss Sommerville, who reposed languishingly on a bear rug beside Maisie. "But if William Tell was scared out of his grammar and

looked like you do now, when the Austrians were after him ——"

"But they couldn't have got him up here," the boy protested desperately; "that's exactly what I mean. Oh, ain't — isn't — it a shame," he exclaimed in real regret, "that he didn't have Cleft Rock?"

"Still, couldn't the Austrians get up here at all?" asked the kind-hearted sergeant.

"You bet they couldn't. Not if the bridge was down."

"Or," suggested Krag, "Mr. Tell might let 'em come crowding on the bridge, and then — *crash!* — cut her loose."

The word "crash," itself crashing through his indolent drawl, made them start. Maisie uttered a little cry. Krag did not seem to notice. Then they all laughed again.

"However," said Mr. Savedge indulgently, while he knocked the ashes from his cigar, "wouldn't it all depend — rather — on the enterprise of the attacking force? Suppose you young people reflect that, first ——"

"Listen to the board of strategy," scoffed Ben, the recently venturesome youth.

"Rah-rah, listen," whispered the rooter chief.

Then the objections: "How much enterprise would it take to climb that bluff?" — "Or up the cleft?" — "Or to run and jump across?"

Mr. Savedge puffed composedly on his cigar. "Reflect first," he said good-naturedly, "that all the enterprise they'd need would be to go on home to dinner, and leave Mr. Tell up here on the Rock, with the bridge down,

where our Doctor Krag has isolated him so neat and snug."

Miss Sommerville applauded softly with her finger tips. "It looks as though it was up to Doctor Krag to get him off," she said, tittering.

"Pshaw, he could jump off into the lake," argued Ben.

"Reprehensible, very," objected Mr. Savedge. "He'd hit on the rocky beach."

"No he wouldn't, not if he could jump out eight or nine feet. Would he?" the boy appealed to Krag.

"I don't believe," said Krag, "that a rickety invalid could jump eight or nine feet."

"Who's talking about a rickety invalid? Wasn't William Tell ——"

"William would be rickety enough when he'd try to make that jump."

"I'd like to know why?"

"Because, Benny, he'd keep on waiting for his friends or some other chance to get him off, and he'd be starving all the time, and when he'd finally see that he *had* to jump ——"

"He'd be too weak to wrastle a rooster," cackled the rooter chief.

There was a laugh, but the laugh died away into thoughtfulness. This Jim Krag's knowledge of human nature was a little bit uncanny. Yes, and unerring cruelty, this putting a finger on the sore that must inevitably lose poor clay its darling spark of life.

"He'd be a goner all right," Ben dolefully conceded.

"It's still up to you, Doctor Krag," insisted Miss

Sommerville. "You broke down poor William's bridge, you know."

Krag was looking at Maisie. "But I left him the trees," he said. He tilted his head backward, to indicate the cleft. His eyes still rested on Maisie, without her seeing him. "You kids study the trees awhile."

They did study the trees. In imagination they climbed first one and then another on the edge of the cleft, searching a limb for a bridge into some other tree on the other side. There were two pines, nearly opposite each other on either bank, whose branches interlaced. Krag admitted that he had these two in mind.

"But, Jim," objected the rooter chief, "there's no branch grows out far enough for a man to climb out on and reach any branch on the other side."

"Then," said Krag, "he'd have to climb out as far as the branch would hold him, then hang by his hands ——"

"And the cleft underneath!"

"Naturally — and let loose ——"

"Don't!" cried Maisie. "Oh please ——"

" —— and as he fell, catch one of the branches from the tree opposite."

"And if he missed?"

"Please, please," begged Maisie, with her hands to her ears.

"William Tell wouldn't miss."

"In other words," observed Mr. Savedge, "a mythical hero wouldn't. I'm afraid," he added courteously, "that that doesn't solve the riddle. As Miss Sommerville so charmingly says, it's still ——"

"Is it?" Krag retorted. He bolted to his feet; then

slowly drew off his coat and started toward the first of the two pines.

"The idiot!" said Savedge, leaping up to stop him.

Yet even in the old callow days Jimmy Krag would have scorned a gallery play. Those who knew him were at a loss to understand.

"What in the world — don't you dare, Jim!" the chubby sergeant called after him. Then in alarm she cried: "Stop, do you hear? I'm afraid Maisie is going to faint!"

He turned. "Aren't you coming?" he asked. "I hear the boat's whistle."

So it was, as they themselves heard now that they listened for it.

Krag came back to them, took Maisie's two hands, and helped her to her feet. She patted her skirts with fluttering hands, and lifted her white face to his, bravely. The tremour of laughter was on her lips. She would let him see that she was vexed with her silly, palpitating heart, and that she really wasn't going to faint, and that now she was going to behave.

"Rest a moment," he ordered briefly.

The others, including Mr. Savedge, remembered that he was a physician. The others, not including Mr. Savedge, nor yet Miss Sommerville, in relief gathered up rugs and bl nkets and wild flowers and started through the deepening shade of the pines toward the bridge.

Mr. Savedge folded Maisie's bear rug over his arm, and cupped a hand under Maisie's elbow. He grew then aware of Miss Sommerville at his other hand, and this other hand — rather, his arm — he gave to Miss Som-

merville. Krag followed, alone, the last of the picnickers.

At the bridge, which was narrow, they caught up with the others. The bridge was crowded, jammed, and everybody was laughing in high merriment. "Isn't the crazy thing swaying?" some one cried out, half in earnest. As Krag, just behind Maisie, bore his weight on the first plank, a timber cracked like a pistol shot.

"Run," shouted Krag, "she's going down!"

A second to realize — then screams and panic. Everybody pushed those ahead, and the force of the press kept them on their feet. The first off on the other side turned to drag off those behind, and were knocked over and out of the way by the rush. The last over was Mr. Savedge, who turned to help Maisie. He supposed she was just behind him. But there was no one just behind him. The bridge was slipping. He stared across. The others, too, breathless from their escape, were staring. At the far end they saw Krag stepping back from the bridge. His foot left the first plank as the bridge went down, as though he had kicked it from him into space. The form of a girl drooped lifeless over his shoulder. He had put out an arm and circled Maisie Hacklette's waist. He drew her back with him as she swooned.

The picnickers waited, some with hands clapped to their ears, for the horrid crash at the bottom, until it came.

Their gaze strained again across the chasm, seeking Krag and the girl. They saw him through the dusk under the pines, a huge, shadowy form, striding over the rocks with his burden.

Miss Sommerville's eyes glittered. Mr. Savedge's mouth opened, and opened again, and he yelled: "Hey, stop, where are you going?"

Krag turned, with one foot planted on the rock ahead. In the silent woods he made a figure of dark, eerie strength. The girl's head was thrown back on his shoulder, her face and throat gleaming.

"To the cabin," he answered. "Why?"

"Why yourself!" screamed Savedge. "Put her down, you ——"

"Mr. Savedge," said Krag, "come and help me. It's her heart. And hurry. I shall need you."

He heard no more, but hastened on with her to the cabin.

CHAPTER EIGHT

Finding a Man, by Himself

AFTER a shock of catastrophe, the naïve in heart instantly and eagerly grope to justify Providence. Suppose the bridge had gone down a minute sooner? They shuddered at what might have been. They pictured Maisie Hacklette a bruised pulp on the rocks at the bottom of the cleft. After she had escaped that, they could not at once accept the thought that the shock of it still endangered her life. They gazed dumbly across the black ribbon of chasm to the cabin among the pines. Krag had made a fire on the hearth, and the window and chinks were a pulsating glow. But they could see nothing, and knew nothing, of Maisie. And the black ribbon lay between.

The steam-boat's whistle blew again, calling them.

They looked at one another in dismay. They were unused to "situations." What was expected of them? Was there something fine, something strong on character, to be done? They were very willing, but they were at a loss. It didn't seem like life to go on tamely down to the steam-boat and on home. They were too young to know that life was just that. The urgent blast reminded them of a mother on the back porch, her hands in her apron,

calling them from play. Did they have to go? The other picnickers, who had been scattered over the island and were tired of waiting at the boat, came to see what was the matter. These listened big-eyed and stared where the bridge had been. At last came the steam-boat captain himself, blustering.

"Contract was to leave at seven-thirty. I wheestled three times."

They told him, gesturing vividly. When the tale had simmered down to no lives lost, the captain emerged again from the man. "What you waiting for then? Their tickets'll be good to-morrow. I'll bring the hook an' ladder company for 'em. Now the rest of ye, come on."

Savedge, who was moving restlessly back and forth on the edge of the cleft, stopped and said: "Yes, yes; the rest of you go on. And the minute you land, 'phone to Mr. Hacklette."

"Then you're going to stay?" asked the rooter chief.

Savedge nodded.

"I think," said the chubby sergeant, "that Archie and I will stay with you."

"Me, too," declared Ben.

"I simply couldn't *think* of leaving Maisie," said Miss Sommerville.

In the end the captain had to leave a dozen tickets behind. Those who remained with Savedge made a fire of pine sticks and sat around on logs and rugs and thought this the best part of the picnic. As the night advanced, the rooter chief fell asle p and snored. Others dozed. Now and then they roused themselves to brighten up the fire, or hallooed over to Krag, demanding news of his

patient. But no reply ever came. Thoughts grew that were embarrassing to youth. When they happened to look at one another, after gazing across at the cabin, their glances shifted hastily.

Mr. Savedge kept himself apart. If they called to him, they found him irritable. His manner added to their disquiet. The way he paced up and down along the edge of the cleft wore on their nerves. Or if he stopped, it was to set his glasses on his nose and peer fixedly at the lighted window of the cabin, and then at the bridgeless gap lying between. A thousand times, at a hundred different points, he measured the width of gap with his eye. Over and over again he decided once more which was the narrowest place. Not twenty feet — maybe only sixteen or seventeen . . . But what was the difference? A man couldn't jump it. No, a man couldn't jump it. But Mr. Savedge never, as yet, lifted his eyes upward. He restrained himself, steadfastly, from lifting his eyes upward. He tried not to hear the soft murmuring among the boughs overhead.

At last, unutterably weary of the grooved circle where his mind toiled, he did look up, and looked up defiantly, as though to challenge a grimacing goblin perched high in the branches. He shoved his glasses tight and studied deliberately the two tall pines that they had picked out that afternoon for William Tell. In fancy Mr. Savedge gained the lowest limb of the tree on his side the cleft. The limb mocked him, it was so easy to reach. He climbed to the biggest limb. The ease of that also seemed provided by Satan. A parallel branch overhead was just high enough to hold to, while he edged out as far as he

could on the biggest limb. Then, in fancy always, though breathing desperately just the same, he even lowered himself and hung at arm's length. Mechanically the next thing was the easiest of all: to let go. But he could not let go.

Another thousand times, in fancy always, he got that far. But he could not let go.

The chaperon had been watching him, and once, as he paused and was looking up, she went to him. "You — you couldn't do it, of course?" she faltered. It was hardly a question. Yet a wan inflection of hope did make it a question, too.

He started, as though awakened, glaring at her.

"Of course you couldn't," she murmured hurriedly.

CHAPTER NINE

As One Would Humanize Paradise

WITHIN the cabin, Krag was not aware of the hallooing. He had achieved the faculty, which dominated even his physical senses, of shutting out as much of the world as lay outside his purposes. He knew that no one could come to him. That sufficed. The picnickers were forgotten.

On the floor of the cabin, to one side of the fireplace, he had strewn pine needles thickly, covering them with a Navajo blanket. He had brought the blanket with him in his canvas telescope. It was odd about this telescope. He had left it here in the cabin during the day, and had apparently forgotten it when he and everybody started back to the boat.

On the blanket lay Maisie Hacklette, and Krag was kneeling beside her. Between his big thumb and forefinger he gently pressed the lobe of her ear, the while watching confidently for the first tint of dawning life. He looked as well on the white, sweet face, and he was not then the physician. A strange softness lay deep in his eyes. Those who had known him during the past three years would have said that they were no more his own eyes. He would have said so himself.

He had done already what was immediately needed to be done. An odour of drugs hung over them. There were restoratives, all but deadly to the normal heart. There was a medicine case laid open, and vials strapped down in a row like shrouded pixies. There were instruments, bright, metallic, tubular, solid, of mysterious shapes and functions; to the lay apprehension the trappings of a star-chamber. The edged ones were unstained; they had not been used. Out of the canvas telescope had come surplusage of foresight. Lacking experience, he was more than ready. Water steamed in the kettle. Some had been splashed on the hearth. A wet and sodden blanket lay near, folded into a compress.

A button-hole of the girl's light blue dress gaped at her shoulder, revealing a flake of linen, like snow, beneath. It was one button that he had overlooked when his harsh ministry was done. Hands, eyes, brain, and blood were impersonal then. But the button was a disturbing magnet now. He put out his hand, and drew the hand back again. These were not the deft, probing fingers of the glorified mechanic of ten minutes ago. He lifted one of the two brown curls lying across her breast, and laid it over the buttonless button-hole. Neither was she a broken mechanism. She was the radiant bit of girlhood, now peacefully sleeping, whom he had seen coming aboard the boat that morning.

The little pump was at its work again. Valiantly now it buffeted inertia that would dam the vital stream. So the poor heart, mercifully given rest between its throbs yet coaxed to beat with vigour, fought off the poisons that stifled, and hastened red wine to the thirst-

ing tissues. The bluish chill faded from her skin, and through and through the flesh glowed in ruddy warmth.

"I know enough, poor child," he murmured. "You will not have to suffer another of these."

He said it in all confidence, though the ink was still green on his diploma. Blood had run through veins since the creation of flesh, but during many thousand years men thought it the ooze of stagnant gutters. Krag marvelled at the colossal stupidity of his species. A charcoal burner hiring a wood sawyer could tell by listening if the sawyer were at his work. But no wise man thought to listen to the heart, until more centuries were added to the thousands of years. The young physician did not grovel before past achievement. He tirelessly searched his own brain for common-sense.

"Three years of my life," he mused. "Anyhow, no matter what fiends I gave them to, they were well given if she is not to suffer another of these."

He turned his head from her, and with his head so turned he got to his feet, and went to the fire. He went noiselessly, and stood, gazing down at the fire. He would not have her awake yet to the memory of the horror at the bridge. His strategy was to prolong oblivion, changing it from syncope to refreshing slumber.

The hours passed like that, she asleep, he looking down at the fire, and the pines faintly rustling outside.

Her eyes opened, lifting sleep's voluptuous weight. Slowly they grew big with the wonder of this awakening. A cabin in the woods, a firelight drowsily rising and falling, a watchful guardian by the fire! It was all one with the blissful ease of her body. Languor blurred the sense of

alarm. When he brought her something in a cup, a something that sent a delicious warmth through her veins, she thought his being there and doing that the natural thing. It was the essence of routine, as one would idealize routine, or as one would humanize Paradise. They were out camping, he and she, that was it; and he, as he ought, had made the coffee while she slept. She sighed dreamily. Horror was remote. Once a bridge had fallen. So had ancient monarchies. She would not fret about history, now that she had graduated. She believed she would sleep a little mite longer.

He leaned over and tucked her pulse under his thumb. "Precisely as strong as fate," he said to himself. Physicians need make nothing of that diagnosis. Very likely he meant that the pulse was normal. Or that here trembled his own thread of destiny. His breast filled; then, as before, he turned his head from her, arose, and went to the fire.

When she stirred again: "Like some toast, buttered hot?" he asked.

So, she thought, the routine was still going on. And natural? It seemed as though it had been going on for months and years. And comfy? Yes, and comfy! Yes, yes, indeed!

"Buttered nice and hot," said she contentedly.

Every vestige of the sick room was gone. Not the faintest hospital taint was left. The fragrance of the woods filled the cabin, and when he brought the toast, there was the soothing fragrance of that also. She braced her palms to the blanket, and sat up, curling her feet under her skirts, and held forth a hand for the plate.

But she only groped for the plate, not seeing it. What had come into his eyes, into his tired gray eyes?

"Your eyes — they are so — so *kind?*" she murmured wonderingly.

But there was in them a quality more appealing yet; the appeal of a man's loneliness, and to her. It smote her with a sublime and terrible pathos. She might hunger for his strength to enfold and cherish her, yet hide the hunger. But this was his weakness, and the hunger to comfort him she could not hide. Before she knew, tears blinded her, and her arm went round his neck, and her lips touched his forehead.

The plate fell, and his arm stretched past her and bent toward her waist. But there it stopped, quivering from corded muscles, without touching her. He stood up quickly, and looked about him.

He found himself at the door, where he turned and saw that she was watching him. Her lips were parted, and the old pallor was spreading on her brow. He recollected himself angrily, and came back to her.

"How about another little nap?" he ordered gently. "Here, a sup or two more of this."

She drank unquestioningly. "Where were you going?"

"Why, Maisie girl, don't you see our wood is all gone?"

He stirred the fire, and waited. It was only when she slept again that he fled.

Savedge noticed him first, coming down the rocky path toward the cleft. Savedge's muttered exclamation roused the others, who got up stiffly, blinking through the drab mist of daybreak at the haggard, hugely magnified figure across the gorge.

They did not understand for a moment, but when understanding flashed on them, they could not believe. Several cried out. "Stop!" "Don't, don't!" "Wait." Some covered their eyes, others could only stare. They stared higher and higher as Krag climbed a tall pine and went out on one of the branches, over the cleft. When the branch bent with a cracking sound, they shivered. When he let go, a girl screamed. But no one heard that. The heard the brief rush of his body through twigs and leaves. They saw him swaying, by one elbow hooked over a lower limb. When he alighted among them, they breathed again.

Savedge went up to him. "You blackguard," he said, choking, "you . . . why couldn't you have come last night, before — before ——"

"And leave my patient?" To make precisely that necessity of remaining with her, Krag had studied medicine, had given the three years. But he did not say so. They could have seen it in his twisted smile. "I wonder you people, and you, Mr. Savedge," he added, his smile twisting because of this contemplation of futility, "didn't bring up the gang-plank from the boat. With block and tackle it would have been a simple matter to swing one end across for a bridge. I — at the last I needed help, badly."

CHAPTER TEN

A Society Item

THEY had to wait for the boat before they could have the gang-plank.

When the boat came, in the first hour of dawn, it bore the character of an important relief expedition, fitted out, hurried, and derided by Mr. Hacklette. Mr. Hacklette was a distressed parent, suddenly in the public eye. The obligations of pose exacted by that camera, like the meat of greatness set before Charles V in Hernani, were matter to fill a paunch. The public eye's incarnation was the *Morning News* man and the *Javelin* man, who were doing dog watch at police headquarters when word of the Cleft Rock accident reached town. Mr. Hacklette was short and severe with these two reporters, in what he fancied to be the manner of a greatly pestered magnate.

No, there was positively nothing that he could tell them. The accident was nothing that could interest the public. They must say nothing about it. They must not mention his name. He refused to be quoted, before they asked him to be. He bit off his words, and made it plain that they annoyed him very much indeed.

"And the old boy isn't an advertiser, hoo-ray!" they chirruped inwardly. They jabbed pungent key words on the margins of the morning paper.

"Get that capital *L*," interjected Mr. Hacklette. "Capital *D*, *e*, capital *L*, period — F. DeL. Hacklette."

"I've got it 'Delavan,'" said the *News* man, which it really was.

"Put it the way I tell you; no, leave my name alone. What are you writing, anyway?"

"Story of 'One Man in a Boat' — count 'em," said the *Javelin* man inaudibly.

Yet there were also on board four firemen with ladders, a number of the picnickers, and Mrs. Hacklette, frankly weeping.

It was no trick at all for the firemen to span the cleft with their ladder, to lay on it a flooring of boards, to cross over and awaken Maisie in the cabin, and finally to lead her, blindfolded, over the improvised bridge and into her mother's arms. Mr. Hacklette's own moist eyes put him into a scowling humour.

Maisie, with an arm about her mother's waist, clinging to her father's hand, looked round on her young friends. In tears and laughter she would make them a part of the scene, and a part of her happiness. Happiness? Why was she so happy? Like a presentiment of something lost, this was a presentiment of something found. But what?

Slowly a bewildering memory began to dawn. Her gaze fluttered wistfully from one face to another. She was seeking a pair of eyes. She sought a return to that routine of his wizardry. Her gaze found him at last,

silent, alone, apart from the others. He was looking at her, and his eyes were kind, and in the same way. Her heart sang joyfully. Somehow she feared that they might not be.

Krag was content to let the social machinery grind on. After three years he had brought his corn to the mill, and he did not mind waiting a little.

But for Mr. Savedge there was sand and discord in the wheels. Miss Sommerville's countenance, on the other hand, was of a saint listening to the music of golden harps.

These three stood watching, each alert for the significant. When Maisie, after her experiences of the night, looked for Krag first among those around her and flushed on meeting his eyes, then did the Sommerville brows arch, and the Savedge brows contract in a puzzled and troubled way. Mr. Savedge was obviously in an anguish of self-debate. He had to gather resolution for a matter abhorrent to his affable nature. When at last he touched Mr. Hacklette on the elbow and drew him to one side, and talked with him, at first warily, then heatedly, even obstinately; when Mr. Hacklette spluttered with explosive incredulity and turned pea green; when finally the proud rigidity of the Hacklette countenance broke to a ghastly twitching — then Miss Sommerville's harps rose in a brilliant and surpassing diapason of malice. She flashed on Krag a glance of enraptured admiration. Krag did not see it. He knew that he would not have to wait much longer.

The picnickers were doing an enormous amount of chattering. Those who stayed had much to tell those who came back on the boat. They marvelled

together over Jim Krag's mythical-hero exploit of the two pines. They felt that they talked to a larger audience because of the two reporters, though they wondered if those nonchalant bystanders were even listening. That nonchalance should have been to them as red lanterns, fire bells, and fog horns. The reporters knew that a good story was dropping.

"Eh? — Oh, sure I believe it," protested the *Javelin* man. "That's all we're allowed to believe, what we hear. Nifty little climb, too. Spells it *C-r* — Oh, with a *K*, thank you. — But, what was he in such a hurry about, this Krag man? Couldn't he wait for the fire department, same as the girl?"

The *News* man picked up a stick a little bit hastily, and whittled. Both hid a growing ferocity of impatience. But there was no answer, because no one knew it except Krag. The reporters feared that they had alarmed their magpies. The *Javelin* man tried to restore the era of confidence by matching the *News* man for his last cigarette.

"My, it does seem odd, don't it?" said venturesome Benny, anxious to interest the worldly gentlemen of the press. "Risked killing himself like that, and couldn't wait an hour or two longer, after waiting across there all night, too . . . *Ouch,* I say . . ."

Gloved fingers were fastened on his arm, Mr. Hacklette's gloved fingers. The boy was at sea before the man's agitated face and working jaws.

"Shut your fool mouth!" But it was at the reporters that Hacklette looked fire and sword.

"Oh well, it's your cigarette," the *News* man was saying to the *Javelin.*

Cried Hacklette: "If you dare print one ——"

"They won't," spoke a hard, impersonal voice over his shoulder; "if there isn't a story, they won't. I don't suppose," Krag went on to the reporters, "that Mr. Hacklette has told you yet that his daughter Maisie and I will be married this evening. That's before your papers go to press, you know."

"Eh? . . . Eh?" Hacklette ejaculated.

"But he will tell you in good time," Krag added.

The *News* man threw up his hands. He was game. "You're right, Doc," he moaned, "that does kill it. Just as we grab off a story, you slip us a society item. Oh, thanks!"

"Awfully," echoed the *Javelin*. — "I declare, look; is this a fit that Delavan is going to have?"

For the instant Hacklette had not recognized Krag. The cool announcement stunned him. Despite all that Savedge had just told him, he could not identify the ominous breadth of sombre young man with the sensitive boy whom he had so wantonly degraded three years before. Anger in a meaner nature varies with its object. Yet when he did recognize Krag, in his fury he saw only a helpless child again.

"So," he cried, "*you* are the filthy brat who compromises my ——"

"Easy," said Krag. "But of course these gentlemen"— he indicated the reporters — "understand that you take it all back."

"Damn you, they understand nothing of the sort.'

"Oh, you do want it in the papers, then?"

"No, no, for the sake of ——"

"Yet you are giving them a story, in spite of all I ——"

"It's none of their business, and I'll have it out with you in private, you — you ——"

"You mean you withdraw what you have said already?"

"Eh? — Yes, of course."

"Then come with me."

Krag led down the trail into the solitude of the pines, Hacklette following. The little group watched them until they disappeared.

"An adjective!" pleaded the *Javelin* man. "Quick, give me an adjective!"

The *News* man deliberated. "Mine is 'consummate,'" he said.

"And I can't beat it," said the *Javelin*. "Lord, if we could run that lad through the type-writer, what a story!"

CHAPTER ELEVEN

An Artisan in Circumstance

AS HACKLETTE followed the young man down the trail, three ideas grew like imps in his brain, until they were imps. The three ideas concerned a pearl-handled knife in his hand in his trousers' pocket; the erect, thick neck of the young man ahead; and murder. Suddenly the imps terrified him.

"Stop!" he said. "This is far enough."

"Very well," said Krag, "though even here, if you bellow out too loud ——"

"Eh! — Ain't you forgetting who you're talking to?"

"Those kid gloves," said Krag; "the way you wear them, irritates me. Take 'em off."

Amazement overspread Hacklette's face. "What I have to say to you ——"

"Take them off."

Hacklette looked into dulled gray eyes shot through with hatred. But Hacklette was most astounded when he perceived himself drawing off the gloves, mechanically, yet in a kind of nervous haste. He tried to believe that he was merely humouring an uncouth ruffian.

"Now," said Krag, "what?"

Hacklette stiffened at the tone. He brought the

well-known frown between his eyes. The nice adjustment of personality had been lost, somehow, but he would put that right again. He remembered, out of a dizzily receding past. that this was only sullen little Yellow Jaunders.

"You know well enough what! First there's Savedge, the aristocratic pup, the ——"

"What about Savedge?"

"A plenty about Savedge, the skut! He comes to me, Savedge does, just now, and he's sorry, and he's changed his mind, and after what's happened last night he really cain't think of my daughter in the same way any more."

Mr. Hacklette stopped. Tears of common human rage strained for release. The white insolence of his brow flooded red, a plebeian red, as vulgar as blood, as vulgar as a father's heart.

"I see," said Krag. "Why don't you make him?"

"What? Marry her?"

"Make him marry her, yes."

Hacklette laughed bitterly. "Maybe *you* could make him?"

Krag's mouth twisted; as he had sneered at Savedge, as he sneered at futility.

"*Could* you?" persisted Hacklette.

"Yes, if I set my mind to it."

An absurd hope crossed the father's despair. "Do it," he cried, "and I'll give you ten thousand dollars."

Krag shook his head.

"Twenty thousand. You've got to."

"No."

"Why not?"

"One reason is enough. Maisie doesn't want him."

"How do you know she don't?"

"She told me so. She refused him yesterday morning."

"Fiddlesticks! That ain't a reason. See here, somehow I believe you *can* make him, and you got to. It's your fault, and you got to. I'll give you a hundred thousand, flat and cold."

"No," said Krag, "there's another reason. I want her myself."

"You — *thief!*" Hacklette raged. "You think you'll get it all. You think — but I'll not leave her a dollar, not a ——"

"No," said Krag, correcting him; "you'll not have one to leave."

Even a maniac, hurling himself against a stone wall, will come to have a respect for the wall. Mr. Hacklette looked this poor widow's son over more carefully. He began to suspect that there was more here than he understood. He doubted if it were stupidity after all that had caused the young doctor to compromise his daughter. Was it avarice, taking advantage of an accident to ensnare an heiress? As Hacklette met the glitter of the dull eyes, he questioned even the accident itself. Was it an accident?

"What — what *do* you want?" he stammered.

He saw a gleam of humour in the level gaze. "Thank you," said Krag, "I take what I want. But I'm still waiting for what you have to say to me."

Hacklette flung out his arms. "There is nothing to say," — his voice broke and trembled, as the boy's had done three years ago — "nothing, nothing, except that

you have got to marry her. I — I guess you can understand that?"

"Yes, I've understood it for three years."

"For three years?" Hacklette repeated. "Surely," he gasped, ' you ain't been planning this all this time! And — and all because of something I happened to say about your mother ——"

"*Don't!*"—Krag's fist was raised — "I've already promised to ruin you. I promise it again, for the next time we meet. But I've tried not to kill you. Don't — make me! It's the one kindness in this world I ask of you."

"It's — it's granted," said Hacklette, breathing heavily. "And — oh, no, don't mention it."

"The safest way," said Krag earnestly, "is not to let me see you again. You'd better go now, and confirm what I told those reporters. I will wait for Maisie here."

PART II

THE BROKEN GIANT

CHAPTER ONE

The Pearl in the Basin

BUN CHUBBUCK, the supernal, was casting up figures at a desk in the state of Sonora in the republic of Mexico. Mr. Chubbuck disdained a stool, but stood at his desk, which was midriff high, so that the desk might have been a lectern and Bunny a surpliced cherub behind it. But figures were sterner material than stern eloquence, and could better mask the stern visage of life, or compel it to a vapid, amiable smirk. Figures were not ungrateful. For their casting up, they exonerated Mr. Chubbuck from the Chinaman's little monthly *cuenta* at the mess house. They laid in a monthly pound of American smoking tobacco for him, which was especially kind, as plug cut came purse-breakingly dear into the Sonora wilderness. They subscribed to a clubbing list of magazines. They permitted him to share the plaza unembarrassed by his German tailor of a Sunday evening when he borrowed the metallurgist's horse and rode in to the *serenata*. They passed him benevolently through the *teatro* portals when an Italian opera troupe stopped over for a week. They bought him "$75.00 U. S. Cur." each first of December to bait with much joy the hosiery of a school of little brother

and sister Chubs back home. So paternally recognizant were they, indeed, of the loyal and patient and beaming Bunny that they held promises of a vacation in the States, perhaps in a year or so. These figures were the informative and preternaturally truthful swarms that inhabited the smelter "books" where Bunny's Uncle Alec had procured Bunny a "job."

Late of an afternoon, when a great lazy ball of fire — Bunny knew it was the sun — was rolling down behind the violet sierra afar off beyond the glare of yellow desert, peppering the heavens with volcano dust, Bunny usually strolled from the mess house and the hope of a third piece of the Chinaman's apple pie, and crossed the compound to the row of cells where, with the smelter's other bachelor Americans, he had his dwelling.

His quarters were one of the cells and a chair tilted against a post of the long porch that shaded the Row. "Shaded" is correct. Bunny had imported, in a letter from his mother, the seed of an abstemious gourd. The Row backed on the flue, which lay like a torpid white dragon dozing among the smelter buildings. It stretched its length from the furnaces below, twisting out of that dull-roaring inferno upon the compound, and thus to the lone smoke stack just outside, into which it thrust its head. The company thought the snake's warm flank good cuddling for American bachelors, especially if ever a winter happened cold. But dust had settled on the photograph of the girl back home and into one's trunk, while the dry desert air bit with the tang of sulphurous fumes.

Mr. Chubbuck sat in the tilted chair, put on his

silver-rimmed spectacles, and thought he would read the advertisements in the last magazine and smoke his pipe. There was an advertisement of a piano with piano-player attachment. . . He glanced in at his narrow cell and gently turned the page. Beside, there was a girl playing the piano thing, and a young fellow in a big arm-chair near by, a finger curved over one eye, dreamily listening to the music. It was very snug and home-like. It was too snug and home-like! In the cell two doors below, the assayer, time-keeper, weigh-master, and sampling-mill boss were starting an evening's session at poker. Chips rattled preparatorily, and what the young men were saying was what they had said last night, and last week, and last month. Why could not people sell pianos without putting in such pictures? Bunny lost a puff at the pipe and his page. The back of Bunny's head caressed the post, and Bunny gazed wistfully, nowhere in particular, unless at the smoke curling deadly and heavy from the top of the smelter stack, and hanging low over its purplish shadow on the saffron desert. Bunny was thinking that he'd like to have that vacation very much. Maisie was up there — up there in the States. Bunny's pipe was out, and the magazine had slipped to the floor.

It was as well to think of something else, and Bunny reflected that he should be hearing from Jim Krag pretty soon now. Two weeks ago Bunny had replied to a letter from Jim. To think of it, Jim being almost a doctor! No, by jinks, he was one already, for it was the 12th, last week, when Jim was to gather in his M. D. Bunny had written Jim that the smelter surgeon had persuaded

the company that he needed an assistant surgeon. After which Bunny had overflowed. How glad he would be to see Jim! Jim must come, sure and certain, as this was just the opening Jim wanted, and it would be a great chance for him, by jinks, it would, and they would rough it through together in Mexico, Jim and himself.

The smelter surgeon, as it happened — as happened with everybody — was fond of Bun Chubbuck, and that was the whole secret of the matter, except that the smelter surgeon suspected that he, the surgeon, was doing too much work. But Bunny was convinced that any position, vacant, occupied, or non-existent, would jump at Jim Krag.

When, mused Bunny, his dead pipe between his teeth, when Jim did come, Jim and he would do heaps in the way of chatting here of an evening behind the gourd vines, and they'd talk of those old days back at school, and how Jim, the rascal, got that medal away from him, and — now here was the bottom of it with Bunny, the pearl in the basin — and perhaps Jim had been seeing Maisie frequently — Bunny hoped so — and Jim would tell him about Maisie, and all the rest of the long evening they would talk of Maisie. . . . Maisie!

A week later Doctor Krag arrived, and Mr. Chubbuck met him at the train, and was presented to Mrs. Krag.

CHAPTER TWO

Old Supernal

IN HALF an eye poor cherubic Bunny perceived — rather, in half a heart throb, he felt — that Maisie was afraid of her husband. In the other half, he almost knew that he, Bunny, was also afraid of him.

Bunny was wedged into the usual swart, sweating, odorous and clamouring throng of Mexicans that surged to the coach platforms when the train emerged from the glare of the desert upon the arid patch of station gardening.

Bunny's narrow-brim straw hat, inadequate, grotesquely jaunty, the style of a yesteryear back home, rode above the maelstrom of peaked sombreros. Bunny craned his long neck as each passenger appeared in the sleeping car door, and he had to look twice to be sure that the heavy, gray-clad young man with squared, gaunt, clean-shaven features was really Jimmy Krag. Krag, filling the door-way, cast one indifferent glance abroad over Mexico, and recognized the beaming grin under the jaunty straw hat. The granite features broke to a smile. Krag's smile had affection in it, though it was a contemptuous affection. Bunny's face was al-

ready the rapturous grin just mentioned. His old school-mate stood for all that he had left behind — his boyhood, of which the memory was the great treasured thing in this later existence that was empty necessity of living. He fought through the leather-aproned *cargadores* mobbing the train, pulled himself up the steps, and grabbed Jim's hand. Bunny could have been laying a parcel — the same being his soul wrapped up — in Krag's absent-minded, crushing grip of fist.

There was some one behind Jim, eclipsed in the doorway by Jim's bulk. Across Jim's shoulder Bunny saw a white flowing tourist veil covering a leghorn hat. Jim stepped out, and Bunny discovered that Jim had not come alone.

For the instant Bunny was so glad to see her that it did not matter how or why she was there. His gladness would not let him think or realize. The first joyful intake of breath came first.

Krag read his face, for it was plainly written there, and over his own passed surprise, amusement, and a kind of grim pity. The sapient look went to Maisie. Maisie's greeting smile was the sunshine. She had always liked Bun Chubbuck, and for her it was a treat to see him again. Krag found himself thanking Bunny in his heart for that sunshine. There had been mists of late that he did not understand.

"How do — how — how do!" Bunny was ejaculating. He held a little gloved hand. He gathered the bright eagerness of two blue eyes. He heard her laughter, broken almost by tears, at him, Bunny, because he was the same Bunny, and a boy as always, as he always

would be. And Bunny, seeing that the boy had all gone out of Jim Krag, knew pity for Maisie, who was of childhood still and who, always, would need childhood's buoyant cheer in a life's companion.

"You see, Chub," Krag announced, "I got her." As though poor Bunny had been watching the getting of her as a species of prolonged and diverting sporting event!

Bunny nodded, eagerly confirmative, though confirmative of what, he as yet paused not to think. Rather dazedly but grinning ever, he laid his handkerchief to his brow. — "I got her."— It was only a clumsy, jocose, bridegroom manner of announcement, such as seems to be required of such occasions. Nevertheless, there was something grisly about it that touched the marrow. Bunny's stricken eyes went to Maisie. What was it about her that was so unfamiliar? Yes, her curls. Curious, that his realization should come with missing them! In the first exaltation of her new estate, the pretty bride had "done up" her hair. But that was not all. Maisie's smile for Jim's announcement was less than perfunctory. It was heartsick — yes, heartsick.

"Well, we might as well be moving. Let me ——" Bunny stooped for Maisie's suitcase and Jim's canvas telescope. And as he leaned over, to the cinder-strewn platform of the car was given the passing of the grin, the sharp wrench of pain, the fixing of the cheerful smirk when he should lift his head to face the next half hour and the future years. "This way. All ready?"

He clove a passage, mostly by energetically shaking his head, through *cargadores* clutching at the valises, and brought his two friends to a decrepit hack. It was

the least decrepit one he could find. Bunny's aim in life seemed to be to get them safely installed in the vehicle, lest truculent brigands should hatchet them at any moment.

There was what the Mexcans called a kilometre — of dust storm, they might have added — between the station and the town, since railroads in Mexico affect an aloofness for towns. They go by them, but rarely to them. So into the dust storm plunged Bunny's hack. At least it made as much dust for the hacks behind as the hacks ahead did for it. The Venetians and Esquimaux might call this a law of compensations, and be philosophic. Bunny thought it matter for apology, and said, by jinks, the natives were talking about the last rain yet. He assured Maisie that the last rain was still an article of human memory. Bunny was a brave soul, and Krag knew that he was from the way he said "by jinks."

Bunny had squeezed himself into the narrow drop-seat of the one-time pretentious coupé, opposite Krag, and not opposite Maisie. Yet Bunny found it hard to keep his eyes from Maisie. Maisie supposed that Jim and Bun Chubbuck had much to say to each other, and she gazed mostly out of the dust-smeared window. She wanted to be curious and interested, but she was homesick and lost and tremulous nevertheless. Bunny thought that in her tan travelling suit and with that tourist veil she looked sweetly fetching and very desirable, and with her trying so hard not to be downcast she looked particularly tempting as one to be cherished and forever shielded from pain. Bunny took his eyes away, almost guiltily, just as

he had tried not to look at the medal Jim had won from him three years before. He said to himself that he couldn't have won Maisie anyway. It took a man like Jim to win Maisie. Everything had come to pass exactly as everything should come to pass. Bunny kept on assuring himself of the eternal fitness of things.

"They wore galoshes along here then," he added, resolutely harking back to that last rain. He would run all his brave soul through the sieve for one grain of cheer.

Krag took pity, and tossed him a straw on the waters. "Any silver out there, Chub?" He lifted his chin at the yellow desert, and beyond, to a purpled blur on the horizon.

"My, yes," cried Bunny gratefully. "That's the Sierra Madre."

Fit to be the mother of sierras, too! It was a barren, treeless range, and hard and remorseless, as if the hot winds of past eons had banked the desert in ridges along the edge of the earth.

"Much silver, I wonder?"

"Much? Well! Hills full of it. That's what makes 'em so high, Jim.— Full of other things, too. Full of what fools had to give, their money, their years, and their skeletons." He pursed his lips with decision. "None of it for mine, Jim."

Krag grunted indulgently. This blessed Chub was but extending the usual warning to the tenderfoot. "Maisie girl"— Krag turned to his bride. Mines were apparently worked out — "would you look at those kids?" Three or four half-naked, reddish-brown waifs were having great fun with a swirling, circling, slowly

moving dust spout. They flung a sombrero into it, which shot skyward, and then chased it, shrieking gleefully. "A little bit of audacity, that. Think of those specks of flesh making a plaything of the desert.— Eh? Oh! But what *were* you saying, Chub?"

Chub was only saying something about *conquistadores*, treasure ships, the Spanish Main, the Royal Fifth, Yaqui massacres, abandoned bonanzas. He was pretty nearly saying the viceregal history of the New World. He wanted to keep Jim to silver. Silver was the great card to play to strangers, and silver would last longer than dust spouts.

"I was just thinking," said Chub, jumping the desert and firmly putting them back on the purple range, "that the *Veta Negra* is out there somewhere."

"*Veta Negra?* That means a black vein."

"What," exclaimed Chubbuck, "you know Spanish?"

"He was studying it, Bunny," said Maisie, "all the time he studied medicine. How he ever managed so much *I* don't know. No one knows." She shot a glance of almost frightened admiration at her husband. "What's more, as long as three years ago he made up his mind to come down here."

"Jim always was near cousin to predestination," laughed Bunny, but he also glanced a little restlessly at the heavy profile before him in the dusty hack. Krag was not flattered. Awe in others did not measure him. It measured them. And he would not have Maisie on that plane with the others. He wanted Maisie in his own habitation.

"The *Veta Negra* ——" Chubbuck persisted.

"Oh yes," said Krag, turning from the window, "your Black Vein? Something *recherché* in vascular systems, I suppose?"

"No, Jim, no, and though you don't care about mines, like me, still a story's a story and a legend's a legend, and if you'll let me just vapourize along about this *Veta Negra*, perhaps it'll entertain Maisie over a few of these bumps. Anyway, it's one of the abandoned bonanzas, Jim. Another case of Indians getting tired of toting two-hundred pound ore sacks up chicken ladders for the Spaniards, and one day murdering every *Gachupin* on the works, and covering up the shaft, and keeping the place a tribal secret for centuries until even the trails to it were lost. Some of the richest bearing lodes down here, accidentally discovered every now and then, are believed or are positively known to be the same as some of those old Spanish workings. But the *Veta Negra* is still a legend, and that means that the excitement about it will never go down until it is actually found and becomes somebody's property. Wonder you never heard of it. If you had a bucket of the *Veta Negra* ore for every sun-cured skull of a prospector out in those hills that's looked for it, you could — why, you could buy a smelter on the interest."

"Blessed old Supernal," murmured Krag.

"Dry up," said Chubbuck. "It's a fact. The Yaquis kill 'em. And if it's the Yaquis that keep a treasure secret, you can bet it's going to stay kept a secret."

"But that vascular ore, Chub? Isn't that going some — even for a legend?"

"Legend? By jinks, it's not really a legend. It's good history. The vein was a hundred feet across, and you can verify that by the old Spanish archives in Madrid or somewhere. And it was so rich that — well, a pick would stick in it like as if it was driven in solid silver, and you couldn't pull it out, like Siegfried's sword, Nothung — you know, the Needful — in the oak tree."

"Needful," said Krag, with the faintest gleam in his gray eyes, "is good."

"Don't ——" Bunny was going to say "smile," but Krag's unpleasantly twisted mouth made him doubtful if it were that — "don't wrench your beauty, Jim, because what I'm telling you, they are facts. Listen here: about a hundred years ago there was a woman of this very town, the widow of a merchant, who had saved a wounded Yaqui from Mexican soldiers. What happened? One night the Yaqui brought her a lump of practically solid silver, black as coal, and big?— took a dozen Indians to carry it. Romance nothing, no! The great scientist Humboldt himself saw it in the City of Mexico. As I say, it was black, and for its colour and size it couldn't have come from anywhere except out of the *Veta Negra*. Now then!"

"Why," said Krag, "that's real entertaining, Chub. Eh, Maisie girl?— Black, you say? I declare. A sulphide then? Probably a deep mine, or was it?"

"Geology! Mineralogy! What else do you know, Jim?"

Krag ignored the ejaculation. "That smoke stack out there," he asked, "that the smelter?"

He pointed to a sooty blur on a little rise between the

town and the mountains. The soot spot was the smelter buildings. The stack pierced the sky above them, a thread of smoke hovering over its muzzle. The patch was not an oasis. It was the desert intensified. The dust was black there. Like a pall it hung over the smelter buildings. Maisie drew back into the shaking, rattling hack from her first look at her new home, and batted her eyes hard.

"They'll give you two rooms over the mess house — oh, nice rooms," Bunny added valiantly. "And maybe later, when one of the cottages falls vacant, which happens pretty frequent. . . . Mike Eldridge the assayer was saying just the other day that he couldn't face his Maker and ask a white woman to stay any. . . . But Mrs. Eldridge is subject to melancholia, you know . . . I . . . . by jinks! . . ." Bunny stopped definitely. He noted that he was failing to cheer poor Maisie.

As they charged with a bump and a bang upon the cobble stones of a narrow street, and there was the drowsy Mexican life around them — saddle-hued faces, serapes, sombreros, rebosas, odours, plaintive phrases caught above the din of wheels and hoofs, quaint signs over shops, barred windows, and gaudily painted adobe fronts, all swaying drunkenly past — and as the rattling, pitching, screeching old hack made pleasant discourse preposterous, Bunny managed the rest of the journey with his heroic smile and a nod or gesture or so, until they were jerked up short before the hotel where his friends might stop for a few hours' rest.

"The company's coach will be by for you this after-

noon," Bunny reassured them, seeing Maisie peer into the dark *patio* beyond the arched portals of the hotel. "Want some *aguacates* — alligator pears, you know? Figs, too — Think you were in the Orient, wouldn't you?" He bought from the pyramid-heaped wooden bowl of a peddler at the door, caught up their hand baggage, and led them into the dank, moist, stone-paved *patio*. Close smells of kitchen, bedchambers, and unwashed, tawny flesh weighted the air. "If you've never tried an *aguacate* salad," Bunny was saying, and thus got them up a flight of slippery stone steps to their rooms.

Bunny had asked no question about "everything back in the States"; to ask hundreds of which he had looked forward so pleasureably to Jim's coming. He remembered with surprise that he had asked not one, and he remembered only when Maisie was gone for a moment to remove the leghorn hat and tourist veil. But still he asked none. He had a queer feeling of utter solitude in the world and he did not care to ask questions. For was not the heart of each of the hundreds of questions the one sweet, potent personality in the next room? Maisie! She was exactly an eternity farther away than the States. And Bunny's questions did not apply to eternity.

All this filled Bunny with a dread that he had not been polite. To show no concern for a dear friend's kith and kin was stupid. It was boorish.

"Do you know you haven't mentioned any of the folks?" He spoke when Maisie returned for her suitcase. "Tell me, how did you leave Mrs. Hacklette, and all of them?"

To his surprise Maisie cast a startled look toward her

husband, who kept his eyes from her and went to the window balcony.

"Mamma's quite well," she said.

"And your father?" Bunny blundered on.

Again Maisie's eyes darted swiftly to her husband, and this time — Bunny could not be mistaken — there was appeal in them. It was as though a weapon were suddenly raised against her father. And Bunny, seeing Krag's face, did not wonder that Krag kept his face from her. The look Bunny saw there made his heart go out in helpless pity to the young wife.

Krag's massive shoulders lifted. For him the thought of Hacklette was dismissed. He turned, but to find Maisie's pleading eyes still on him, and a look of sharp pain came into his own eyes. Then his jaw set. Hacklette had given him Maisie. But Hacklette still kept Maisie from him, just as during three years Hacklette had stood between him and his pride of manhood. He kept from him happiness, his hope against loneliness, his mate, as surely as though the episode on Cleft Rock had never been. Hacklette pursued him with the meed of hatred. And it was hatred, gleaming in steel gray eyes, that caused Maisie to shrink from her husband. Because she shrank, the hatred grew. Krag now charged against the man Hacklette his bride's pitiful fear of him, and each stab of pain that that meant.

Krag, turning heavily again toward the window, was caught by the dismay on Bun Chubbuck's face. He saw the poor fellow whip his gaze from Maisie. Krag paused and contemplated Bunny, a little puzzled, a little meditating, a long time. He uttered a contemptuous

grunt. But another thought came. He drew Bunny out on the balcony.

"Chub," he said, "you've got to make her laugh! Make her smile — something. You've got to, or I believe I'd kill you."

"Poor old Jim," said Bunny suddenly, "I'm afraid it's killing you already."

CHAPTER THREE

The Desert Rat

DOCTOR KRAG'S duties at the smelter were not excessive. Occasionally a peon at the furnaces backed into a slag pot, and landed with a comical splash into the molten mass, his arms and feet pawing the air, a contortion of intense amazement on his face. Usually the doctor prescribed a wooden box painted pink, and the company gave his widow fifteen pesos. If it was a burro that the peon lost instead of his life, the company gave the peon twenty pesos. The company methodically scaled all things to schedule, from mortality to a settlement sheet.

Other casualities were not always so conclusive, and science intervened to prolong uncertainty. Also they interfered with the smelter surgeon's practice in town. Wherefore the surgeon had demanded an assistant. It was in this fissure operated in the company's payroll that Krag found himself. His generous chief turned over to him more and more of the casualties, as being "a gorgeous chance in chocolate ivory for bringing up one's technique." But fissures are abhorrent to corporation schedules. At the end of a year Krag found himself his own chief. This helped all round. The surgeon had all his time for town practice. Krag

had more of gorgeous chance. The company had a surgeon at an assistant's salary.

In due course, which was ten minutes after the next following pay-day, Doctor Krag made it clear to the company that his friend Bunny would have to cast up a rather larger figure on the smelter surgeon's bi-monthly salary voucher. He tendered the voucher itself for revision.

"Oh well," said the manager to the superintendent later, still with a sharply defined impression of the recent interview, "he's twice old Doc anyhow."

"Twice?" echoed the superintendent. "The only requisition he's turned in in months has been for ——"

"I know; mustard plasters. Now what the Sam Hill does he want with so many mustard plasters?"

"Never mind," said the superintendent. "Maybe they're little stepping stones to good health. Anyway, when you see a Mexican nowadays go into the hospital, you can bet your grandmother that he's a sick Mexican — a sure sick one, all right. Here, I'll just bet you myself that we're saving enough out of the men's hospital dues to pay that silent, rock-ballasted demon his raise twenty times over."

"Demon? I can quite believe that, but ——"

"Watch him once with his knives and his needle working over some gory smear that used to be a perfectly good peon. He's as cold as ice and swift as a steel trap, and his jaw's undershot, and inside — that's my theory — he's fighting mad, a white-heat mad. And the more darn foolish it is trying to sew up the basket of ribbons into a man again, the icier and hotter and madder he gets."

"He loves the lowly peon, then?"

The superintendent vented the one improper word for disgust. "I dope it out this way," he explained. "It's table stakes against the Reaper with him, and he hates to lose. No, he declines to lose; that's it, he declines."

What was called a hospital was not a hospital at all. Ordinarily it was a dispensary. It was a low, white, stone building of two rooms, three barred windows, and one outside door. The first room contained a roll top desk and swivel chair, a gun rack, a wooden bench, bottles on shelves, a pharmaceutical cabinet, freight boxes partially unpacked, the odour of iodoform, disorder, and dust. The dust cushioned all things. Flies perished in it, and were buried.

A door between the two rooms, always kept closed, led into the second room, and here was the realm of the scrubbing brush. Every morning three muscled Mexicans scrubbed. After which operation, it was the operating room, shining, polished, clean, with table, stand, lavatory, instruments, windows double screened, and not a fly, either alive or buried.

Krag received, on suspicion, in the first room. Each shift brought him its woes of body or imagination, and waited on the long wooden bench, while the *señor doctor* tilted back heads and lifted eyelids and looked at tongues, and turned a trembling peon's soul inside out, and grunted. If it was quinine or calomel that the peon wanted, to barter for *mescal* at the *cantina* under the hill, the doctor diagnosed that too, and softly said: "*Vamanos* — Flit!" If that peon fraudulently came a second time, the

doctor prescribed Specific No. 1, which was a mustard plaster and non-negotiable, laid firmly on the shoulder blade by the *doctor* himself. And perhaps the doctor's own cheyenne salve was laid on after that. The works had never been in such a state of health.

But any peon, however foul; any vermin-ridden flesh, so only that it contained life and was about to lose life, was very welcome. The Reaper's seal was his passport. Such a one Krag would bear to the inner shrine, into the waiting sanctuary of the scrubbing brush. The surgeon then was greater than loving care. He was the ferocity of determination, the more so because his foe, being death, was the deadliest foe; the more so because that which he championed he most despised, mortality. To such he gave his skill, daring, caution, and patience, his days and nights, working swiftly or watching silently, while whiter men of lesser ills might wait or rot, as they chose.

The superintendent unwittingly had hit it right. This was Krag's game. It was his play time, though his bread-winning time. It was release from the vanishing point; his recreation. The rest of the day, or of the night, was his real work, which with Krag was Krag himself.

Yet this real work looked like the dawdling phase of his existence. Intellectual dawdling, the superintendent called it, as when Krag conceived a weird notion to study the Yaqui dialect. For the Yaquis were not a *conversazione* people. They murdered, and did not linger. And if they did, who in thunder would want to talk to them, anyway?

Besides, if one absolutely must talk to Yaquis to be

happy, why not do it in Spanish to the Yaquis *pacíficos* working for the smelter? These *pacíficos* all knew Spanish. Many of them had been living in civilization for generations, though they disappeared sometimes for a while, and perhaps their wages often went for Mauser shells to send to the untamed Yaquis in the sierra. They were good workmen, and the smelter's best paid natives, and the company managed to keep the watchful government from putting them in chain gangs, as was being done with *pacíficos* elsewhere while the sierra Yaquis stayed on the warpath.

Still, there was no explaining the young doctor. He was always ready to go when a *pacífico* child in the village fell sick. A *pacífico* required only a word of Yaqui to get the doctor's ear, at any time and no matter where. The superintendent even suspected that Krag gave them lead from the assay office. Leisure, comfort, sleep, all these the untalkative Doctor Krag would forego for his linguistic passion.

Krag had other and more rational amusements, but they were seemingly as aimless. For example, the superintendent was always glad to let him help figure out a metallurgical charge. It began by Krag sauntering in one day and idly wondering how they kept the furnaces from freezing up. Likewise he had strolled into the laboratory and was soon doing some determinations for antimony, while the chemist sat down and read the paper. Eldridge the assayer entertained him, too, by letting him pull the cupels out of the little hell over which assayers preside, or weigh gold and silver buttons, the specie of

the little hell as of Hell, on glass-encased scales. In the prevailing state of health Krag could often loiter a half-day with one of these amiable toilers, or even with the manager himself in the ore-buying sanctum. But none of them realized how much he soon knew about the extraction of values from the rocks of the earth.

Krag had need of the larger figure henceforth cast upward by Bunny. He had sent Maisie to Mexico City, secretly hoping that she might find sunshine there and bring it back with her. She stayed two weeks, and begged to come back. But she brought no sunshine. Else it went into the desert's glare. Now he wanted to send her for a visit home. And send her he did. She was to stay as long as she wished, no matter how long. He made it explicit; gently, yet explicit. She stayed a month, and begged to come back. He knew she would. Soon after she had her baby, a baby girl, but that was not the sunshine — not quite — though they named her Alice.

That baby! She earned her father's attention as an instance of the most troublesome and stupid of the young of all animals. She was an item the more in his contempt for the human species. For the species, that is, because as babies go she was an exemplary babe; which he was entirely willing to accept on faith and her mother's word. But his scientific discernment would not let him away from the fact that Alice referred the universe and all that in it was, and her mother most of all, to her little tummy. Krag kept it to himself, but he could recall no young animal feeding that was more purely animal at that festival than this wee thing sprung from his loins. Yet, when excess was vocalized in terms of colic, the one to

walk her through the endless reaches of the night was himself, precisely as he would thrust the bulwark of his flesh and bone between Maisie and every pest. And his hand, that might tear away the jaw of a lion, stroked his baby girl's fragile head, and soothed her in the Nirvana of his huge vitality.

The meagre American society of mess house and cottages alleviated both desert and smelter, although it was a narrow, gossipy, tattling little circle in its mutual, self-sacrificing helpfulness, and as ridiculous as an army post over the precedence of one's husband's position and salary compared to the same of each other woman's husband. The safety valve for husbands was to pack them off to the States whenever they could find the money. All, however, were of accord about Maisie's little trips. They deplored her going. They needed no perfunctory exclamation to be glad when she came back. Maisie was *hors de concours*. They would relish seeing her brows lift. They longed to see her tilt her chin. But Maisie's brows and chin were not of that kind, unless in making delightful faces at Baby Alice, and Baby Alice, like queens and empresses on their thrones, was not fretting about precedence.

So there were other reasons why Krag gave Maisie the little trips. The reasons abounded when he could no longer bear the frightened look in her gentle blue eyes. He dreaded, some day, to see her cringe from him. He had made her heart all snug and right so far as hearts go as mechanical pumps. But he could not make it snug and right as a register of joy and a chronometer of bright seconds. And his hatred of Maisie's father grew

because Maisie's life also was dwindling into wretchedness. He would not see that this hatred itself, and the sodden, heavy look of it in his eyes, reared the barrier between Maisie and the sunshine. He saw only his hatred's object as that barrier.

But, after all, the need of Maisie's little journeys back into the world was a current need only, like coffee at breakfast or the baby's safety pins. It did not concern the vanishing point, and Krag's unflinching gaze was always on the vanishing point. His need of more salary had to do with coffee and pins and Maisie's least desire, but not ultimately. Ultimately, in some strange way it had to do with an occasional lean, leather-fleshed, rope-sinewed, dust-begrimed, and half-naked native off the yellow desert who had come from the terrible sierra beyond the desert.

Cutting blasts had matted the dust in the creature's straight black hair, whose stiff tufts pierced the cracks in a rotting sombrero. The saffron powder was ground into the seams of the lean face and into the creases of the neck. Like tawny gilt on bronze, it streaked the hollows between the ribs, seen when the ragged *manta* blouse lay back before the wind. It filled the deep cracks in the man's heels, which were of tougher leather than the sandals under them. It stained the cotton *calzones* flapping about the thin, knotted legs, and through every stitch it was caked and rusted.

This occasional native was a desert rat. He was a chameleon of the waste, meek, passive, and surviving. Bones, tendons, and hide, these were wrought to endure his habitat, and his brain was an instinct to skulk before

the fiercer creatures out there. To the very membrane of his gullet the heat had sucked out the juices, until that also was parched to the chameleon hue. Then one day the desert rat would blot himself against the outer smelter wall, lethargic, patient, and athirst, waiting for one he knew, that he might lave the crackling membrane in *aguardiente* of a fire to match the sun's own.

One afternoon at five o'clock, as was his custom during the two years he had been at the smelter, Krag locked the hospital door behind him, putting an end to professional routine for that day. Except when a joust with the Reaper was on, he would then return to Maisie and the baby — more apparently, let us say, to his books on mineralogy — in the stifling and dusty rooms over the mess house.

But this afternoon, as he passed through the smelter gates, nodding to the two policemen always on guard there, a desert rat detached the blot of himself from the wall and drew alongside the doctor, taking off his limp sombrero as he did so.

Krag glanced down at the dust seamed face. "How, Plácido; back, are you?" He could tell the natives apart, which is a trick that requires practice.

"*Pues si, señor.*" The man put the sombrero brim between his teeth and began fumbling with his loin cloth. From its knotted ends he drew pieces of rock, and laid them on Krag's broad palm. While Krag examined them, he waited stolidly, like an old dog. Krag hefted the rocks one by one, turned them over, examined them under a pocket magnifying glass. He seemed greatly bored. The Mexican's dog-like eyes shifted from the

white man and on down the little hill, to the village of thatched adobes where *aguardiente* was sold. They came back, and met the steel gray eyes of the white man. The Mexican quailed, although there was no lie in his heart.

"You have been gone," said Krag, "two weeks and three days. I advanced you a *medio* a day, to buy beans and *tortillas* for two weeks. Three days over; eighteen cents I owe you. Take them."

"But *señor*," faltered the man, "there are yet the two *reales* a day ——"

"Did they not pay you in the mine where you have been working?"

"In a mine, *señor?* Truly, I work in no mine. The *señor* must believe that I work for him only."

"Are you a liar, Plácido?"

"*Pues, no, mi patron.* I am prospecting only for the *señor.*"

"Am I a fool, Plácido?"

Plácido shrugged vaguely. "The *señor* should know."

Krag handed him back the rocks. "See for yourself, Plácido. Yes, they are heavy. Yes, there is silver in them. But they are not outcroppings. They are not reddish. You would not call them *colorados.* You would call them *negros,* so that they came from deep down — eh, Plácido? But after all, Plácido, you have not told me where you got them?"

"In a mine, *señor.*"

"Ah, then ——"

"No, *mi patron,* I did not steal them. I have not been working in a mine. Yet they came from a mine. A *mina tapada,* an *antigua,* a lost mine, *señor.*"

Krag gravely took the rocks and dropped them in his coat pocket. "A peso on account, Plácido. Here." The desert rat caught the coin, knotted it in an end of his loin cloth. "Be here," said Krag, "at five o'clock to-morrow. At five the day after. At five the day after that, until we start for your lost mine. Does it happen by any chance to be the *Veta Negra*, Plácido?"

A scene such as this had happened before many times. A half dozen desert rats were even then in the sierra wilderness beyond the yellow desert, each trailing it alone among the peaks, each solitary waif alert for rock and "sign," skulking from the Yaquis; and each with the smelter surgeon's beans and *tortillas* tied into a corner of his blanket.

Plácido's sandals fell like pads in the dust, pattering down the hill toward the clustering adobes. Krag turned back to the assay office with his bits of rock.

CHAPTER FOUR

The Phantom Mine

KRAG never left Maisie behind, if he could help it. He rarely left Bun Chubbuck behind. Yet the gray eyes seemed to be unseeing. He wanted Maisie along for himself. He wanted Bunny along for Maisie to talk to. The desert and sierra were a prescription. They were good for Maisie. Had it been necessary to buy them, at no matter what price, and the hot, dry winds thrown in, Krag would have thought them cheap, for browning Maisie's creamy skin, for ruffling her hair, for making her toss back her head in the luxury of deep breaths, for the dancing and crisp sparkles in her blue eyes. Others of the smelter settlement who cared to go along were welcome, but the others had early acquired discretion. Krag's outings across the sands did not have the name of picnics. "They were," said the superintendent, "roughing it down to the brass tacks. They weren't country club stunts. They were the real business."

But to Maisie and Chubbuck it was no extraordinary thing, when Krag looked twice on a rock brought him by one of his desert rats, to mount little mustangs, with sheathed rifles under their stirrup leathers, and ride with him from Saturday noon till midnight, camp in the

mountains where the desert rat led them, spend Sunday morning there, and toward daybreak Monday see the smelter stack again. For Maisie the stack stood for Maisie's baby. The nearer the stack, the nearer that baby, who was necessarily left behind with one or another of her worshippers among the smelter women.

After the first few trips the bit of rock in the affair seemed to Krag's wife and friend an incident merely. Nothing ever happened, and they were no more excitable over the chance of a bonanza. Krag would follow the outcropping pointed out by his desert rat, stoop for chunks of float, perhaps drop one in his pocket for future assay, and coming back to camp would say: "Well, let's eat," and seem to forget all about it. So far he had not "denounced"— located — a single prospect.

But Maisie and Chubbuck felt that, once this silent man did show interest, it must warrant excitement in a lesser nature. A lighter head, indeed, might have been turned by some of the indications that Krag passed over. Krag, however, had his own system. Of a prospect he exacted both high grade and width of deposit and both must show practically at the grass roots. Aught less, he mentioned to Chub, could neither build a railroad nor break his heart. In his secret soul Krag was wondering if, after all, the curse of futility were dogging him. But doggedly he kept on. He thought of Hacklette and his promise to Hacklette. He scorned an antagonist on equal terms, but wealth multiplied one antagonist into many. By wealth an antagonist projected his prowess by the prowess that he could buy. Krag proposed to overcome that handicap. Then on Hacklette first, he meant to jus-

tify his existence, not as a unit of spawn on the earth, but as a man as those three letters spelled the word to him. He would exemplify mastery of the thing he lived on.

They had three days, and needed as many, to verify Plácido's tale of a lost mine. May the fifth, one of the days that Mexico celebrates, fell on a Friday. Saturday, consequently, was as good as a holiday, after which came Sunday. With pack burros, water skins filled, and armament, they started Thursday afternoon. They camped at midnight. By sun-up they were again trailing the desert.

The way was heavy. The little caravan moved in a stirring of powdered mist that moved with it. Ahead the jagged mountain wall was plum-coloured, splashed with lavender, mauve, rose, and rust, with tints of the opal, aflame, vivid, and near enough, they seemed, to touch. The three Americans knew by now the desert's fascination. It had grown into them, and they responded with a craving-like thirst of the over-soul. However far they might roam hereafter, they knew that they would long to come back, and would come, if they could.

Yet the call was of death rather than of life, and at first it was terrifying and dreadful. A living thing was an isolated thing, and alive only because it was a rare, brave thing. Life nowhere crowded here. It was of a desolate exclusiveness. Only gray tufts of chaparral flecked the waste. Krag had an affection for these indomitable Spartans. Tramping for miles on foot next his wife's stirrup, his horse's bridle over his arm, he talked of it. He never talked much, and never for the sake of talking, but it had become a habit with him to strive on

and on for Maisie's comradeship, hoping that yet she might chatter with him as she did with Bunny.

"There's a tumble-weed," he said, pointing to a drab, leafless little bush hardly bigger than his fist. "See it rolling along there, just wherever this wind blows it. Maisie girl, what's your opinion of a poor fool thing like that trying to grow?"

Or he showed them, here a greasewood almost buried under the sand, there another fallen over, its roots undermined by the wind. He showed them an organ cactus cut through by the sand blast. The sun scorched the soil beyond the point where plants are thought to live. The sky often withheld the dew. Aught of leaf or fibre hinted of food to every ravenous desert animal. But Krag showed them the thorns that kept off the fanged jaws. He showed them the hairy air cushions that clothed a plant against the blaze of day and the chill of night, or the shellac covering that armoured it, and he told them why the leaves grew small, or why there were no leaves at all, since then the sun might not suck forth all the precious moisture. And then he bent forward in his stride, and his lips brushed his wife's riding skirt.

At times he looked up at her, but not hopefully. True, the pallor of brow and cheek was no longer there. At the worst, it was but faintly suggested under the desert's tempered alchemy of tan. He was gratefully triumphant in that alchemy wrought by his merciless colleague, the desert. Often and often he looked, though mostly she talked with Chubbuck, and as for himself he had little to say, and the tenderness that racked him with pain softened the remorseless glint in his eyes. His heart as

he looked up at her was his intelligence. It told him that here was a human soul, one that yearned to cling for warmth, to nestle for affection, his to cherish, to make for it the minute of this life a transcendant minute of joy; a soul that was his soul's responsibility, lest having that dear essence in his keeping he mar it. So he bent in his tracks like that, until his lips brushed her riding skirt.

She had turned to Chubbuck, answering a question.

"Indeed, yes," she was saying, "I dearly hope they *will* come, though I don't know how they'll like our desert, do you, Bunny? Jim's thorns would scare away touring cars too, and anywhere papa can't go in his touring car —— What was that?"

She turned and looked down, but Krag had straightened, and she thought it only his elbow hitting her stirrup. He quickly averted his head. He knew that the look she dreaded was on his face, come there at mention of her father, and he could not bear to see the shrinking in her wistful blue eyes. In the same impulse she swayed from him toward Bunny.

Krag mounted. Hatred was in the saddle now.

He took one of Plácido's rocks from his pocket and handled it musingly as he rode. Maisie and Bunny ceased their talking. They had never seen him intent so on a rock before. They stirred restively, not knowing why. They had only his profile, under his high peaked sombrero with its silver rope, a profile harshly carved, hard of mouth and jaw and chin. The eye under its heavy brow was narrowed to a slit against the wind and glare. His sallow features had

taken the desert's own tint. "In that climate," a quaint old chronicler once said, "the people turn yellow. It may be that the desire for gold which fills their hearts shines forth in their faces." Bunny's skin was only burned. The blushes could still mount through it.

Krag looked up, at the trail ahead, and only then noticed, seemingly, that he was the object of their interest and their silence. He bent his gaze on them quizzically.

The suspense in cherubic Bunny's expression did not escape him.

"It is really a black ore," he said, as if to continue his thoughts aloud and gratify their curiosity. "You know what that means, Chub? For if it were reddish, what then? It would mean that surface waters had oxidized it, consequently, that it lay near the surface. But this —" he tossed the rock, caught it, meditatively — "is dark and undecomposed. The surface waters of a hundred years, or a hundred thousand, haven't had a chance at it. It's still a sulphur base. It's a silver sulphuret. Consequently — what?" He flung a leg over the pommel of his saddle, and looked past Maisie at Chubbuck.

Chubbuck's uneasy attention quickened. His innocent soul grew aware of temptation. Krag noted that, but went on, as a geologist fondly absorbed in his deductions. "So this rock in my hand is to-day, chemically, just what it has been for some millions of years since the earth was a melting pot, before this desert was the bottom of a sea, before even a two-legged creature needed a silver dime for a loaf of bread, or bushels of 'em for a touring car." He tossed the rock again. "There's a dime in my little bric-a-brac here. It's been waiting for me all

this time. What do you think, Maisie girl? Isn't that a lot of patience for even an inanimate thing?"

"Eldridge says," said Chubbuck," that the piece you gave him would run four hundred and thirty ounces."

Krag nodded impatiently. This was not pertinent. It was trivial interruption. It was elbowing him from the marvels of cosmic science.

"And," Bunny went on, "a trace of gold."

This time Maisie's eyes opened anxiously. The little maternal person was disturbed by these signs in Bunny. Bunny should not meddle in mines. He would never be old enough. Bunny, casting up figures, had so far done it wisely, academically, platonically. So many ounces of silver to the ton, so many ounces of gold to the ton; these were figures only. He cast them up into dollars and cents; again, figures only. He did not see the men who brought the ounces and tons to the furnaces. He did not see the men who pocketed the dollars and cents. But he saw Jim Krag very distinctly.

"What's more," said Bunny, "it carried lead. I don't remember how many units Mike said, but anyhow it was enough to mean a premium on the ore instead of a charge for smelting."

Krag was studying the rock as if it were a key to the cosmos.

"Jim," cried Bunny, casting up the figures, "don't you know that that would net, at the smelter, something like two hundred and seventy-five dollars a ton?"

"So," said Krag, summing up his own reflections, "Plácido must be right. It can't be an outcropping."

Thus he brought the chain of his meditations to the

last link of Bunny's numerals, and the two chains were welded, remorselessly.

"You don't mean," protested Bunny, "that it came from a mine? You're not thinking of buying a mine, Jim?"

"On my income?"

"Then how did your prospector — where ——" Bunny gestured at the rock in Krag's hand.

Krag made no reply in words. Chubbuck saw his twisted smile, full of meaning, and saw him nod backward over his shoulder at the pack burros and drivers straggling behind them. One of the burros was loaded on either flank with a great coil of rope.

"It's a — an abandoned shaft," cried Chubbuck, "and you're going down into it!"

Krag looked at him, and Bunny flushed. Of course, an abandoned shaft with four-hundred-ounce ore in it so near the smelter would have been found out long ago.

"No," said Krag, "there are no signs of the shaft left."

"Why, Jim," cried Maisie, "it must be a — a phantom mine!"

Instantly, on hearing Maisie's voice, Krag was willing to explain.

"Not at all," he said, "only the Yaquis must have done a clean job, filling it up, covering it over, making a genuine *mina tapada* of it, as Plácido says. There's not even a stone left of the old *real* — fortress, you know — such as the Spaniards used to build around a shaft. For centuries, until Plácido came along, the desert rats

have been going over the spot without once smelling a grain of ore."

Maisie's brows crinkled in perplexity. "Pshaw, Jim ——" she gave way to exasperation — "you're either fooling us, or your Plácido is fooling you."

"No, Maisie, I'm not, and he's not."

"But you're telling us," insisted Bunny, "or letting him tell you, that *he* smelled it out, the Lord knows how."

"Suppose," said Krag calmly, "we go back three hundred years. It won't take long. We find the Spaniards, with their Indian slaves, working our phantom mine. They have sunk on a rich vein in the side of a mountain, They follow the lode down as far as it goes. Then they drift — you understand, Maisie; they tunnel horizontally — and dig out the vein as they go. And one day while they are digging in the breast of their drift, what happens? — The tunnel caves in behind them, that's all. They are there yet."

"Oh!" Maisie pictured starving, entombed men; not their skeletons.

"Then what?" demanded Chubbuck.

"I told you. Then the Yaquis fill up the shaft. Also they murder the Spaniards left above ground, so that no more white men shall know of that mine and come to enslave them."

"But your Plácido? How —— "

"I see," said Krag, his lips twisting, "the mystery remains. Well, then, I should have said that when the Spaniards tunnelled, they tunnelled with the slope of the mountain, so that each foot brought them a little nearer to the surface. Finally they drifted into a pocket;

at least, the vein widened and bulged upward, and they went to work digging it out — stoping, it's called, Maisie — scooping out a wide, high chamber in their tunnel. They were still doing it when the tunnel behind them caved in, and it was in this stope where they perished."

"But Plácido?"

"Oh, yes, Plácido. Well, he was down in this stope."

"Jim, three hundred years ago!"

Krag laughed. Maisie *was* interested. "No, no, the other day. The Spaniards had stoped up close to the surface, and the crust over this tomb was pretty thin, so thin that three hundred years of rain wore in the roof. At last, just a little while before our famous Plácido passed that way, the roof caved in, and our famous Plácido found it. There, Maisie, is that satisfactory?"

For a time they rode in silence, letting imagination feed.

"But — see here, Jim," objected Bunny, "if the vein runs with the slope, and it has been dug out as far as you say, then there can't be much of it before it crops out on the surface, and there's an end to your vein."

"And others would have found that outcropping ages ago," added Krag. "But the surface slopes up again, Chub, just beyond the stope, and on this surface the outcrop of the vein is entirely obliterated, and the vein goes — the Lord you mentioned knows where."

"You've probably got "— Bunny's eyes were glistening — "a — bonanza!"

Krag's heavy shoulders lifted. This was the business side of it; his business. But his friend was muttering: "Two hundred, three hundred dollars net — Lord, Lord!"

"Jim," cried Maisie, "what does he mean?"

"I mean," said Chubbuck, "that soon Jim will be drawing the smelter's check for two, three, four, five hundred — a thousand dollars a day."

"Yet," said Krag, "there'd have to be a railroad first, across this desert, and I'd have to — yes, I'd have to let others in on the bonanza."

im," said Maisie timidly, "are you — that is, Jim, if you *must* let others share in this — oh, Jim, dear, I mean, you're not forgetting papa?" It was the chance, she thought, the chance for reconciliation between those two.

Krag abruptly bent his head to the pommel, to the rock in his hand, that she might not see his face.

"No, Maisie," he said at last, "I'm not forgetting your father."

CHAPTER FIVE

The Aristocrat of the Charnel House

AFTER a time they perceived a foot-hill off to the right, then two more on their left. These mauve warts of the desert, ancient, barren, eroded, seemed to have swelled there but a moment since, breaking the ring of the horizon. After an hour, more foot-hills rose in front of them, and thus gradually the flat waste gave way to another barony of the wilderness. The sierra was closing about them.

Finally they were in a wide ravine, banked by the hills. The sand under foot became moist. The sand grew to pebbles. Next their horses trod a bed of rock, littered over with small bowlders, and there was a tiny, trickling stream. The hills came nearer, growing together, and suddenly were mountains, high, rugged, overhanging, precipitous. The little brook was making itself heard, as it tumbled and raced over green-hued ledges. The ravine narrowed. The bulk of mountains crowded almost on their toes. The shadows deepened. A depressing sense of something lost crept over the moving human dots in the bottom of the gorge. At last they remembered. It was the blazing sun that was gone, screened from them as by a smoked glass. Looking up, they saw the sky, a gossamer of blue laid over the

cracked earth. In the azure down, pin-point stars were twinkling.

"How's this for a real cañon, Maisie?" asked Krag, as a physician might ask if his medicine was pleasant to take.

"It's grand — grand!" she murmured. "Oh, think, let's give it a name."

"Can't," said Chubbuck. "It's already the *Barranca Quebrante.*"

Maisie was disappointed. "The breaking gorge," she translated. "Pshaw, what a chance thrown away! Beside," she insisted, "that's not — why, not grammatical. What does it break? If it were even the *Barranca Quebrada* — the broken gorge — now that would mean something. But whoever heard of a gorge breaking anything?"

It was referred to Plácido, and Plácido shrugged his shoulders. A *tortilla* was a *tortilla.* A *serape* was a *serape.* The *Barranca Quebrante* was the *Barranca Quebrante.* But he didn't know why. Why, *señores,* was a why desired?

A little farther on, the wall of the gorge on their right opened into a ravine, which drained the slope of a mountain on either side like the valley of a roof. Plácido hailed them, saying that here was the best place to camp. Krag ordered his burro drivers to pitch Maisie's tent, which was the only tent, near the brook; then struck off up the ravine with Plácido, Maisie, and Chubbuck to have a look at the lost mine.

Answering a question from Krag, Plácido touched his sombrero and waved an arm over the mountain slope to the left.

"You asked him where the stope is?" demanded Chubbuck.

"No," said Krag, "for we already know it must be almost under the bed of this ravine. I asked him which side it's on. It's on that side." His arm swept the mountain rising on their left. "The shaft was sunk not very far up the slope. From the bottom of the shaft they drifted toward the ravine. They would have passed on under the bed of the ravine, following the vein into the mountain on that side." He swept the mountain to the right.

"And the poor Spaniards" said Maisie, "they're in there!" She stared pityingly at the sierra's mass under her.

"That's all right, Maisie girl. They're held down."

"But where, Jim?" Chubbuck insisted. "Where's the stope?"

Krag nodded ahead at the lean desert rat plodding up the ravine's dried bed. "The answer's in those whipcord legs," he said.

"But," said Maisie after a little, "the answer seems to be lost."

Plácido had stopped. His eyes roved, locating a remembered ledge here, a scrub oak there. His fingers went into his coal black hair.

"*Señor*, it's — gone!"

"Gone! What, a hole in the ground?"

The dazed fellow smiled weakly. "Yes, *señor*."

Something about this struck Maisie as funny, and she began to laugh. The vanishing of a bonanza, like breaking a leg, is not usually humorous, but when it is, one

has a unique treat. The unexpected thrill of merriment made Krag thank his bonanza for vanishing. But Plácido was woefully distressed.

"The favour, *señor*," he pleaded. "Let me see one of the rocks in your pocket."

"Is the man dippy?" exclaimed Chubbuck. "He might as well try to find a dog by his bite."

"It's not that, Chub," said Krag. "Plácido's universe is tottering. Look at him. He sees that the rocks he gave me are real, and they help him to believe that he got them from a real mine. A dog's bite would assist you to the same certainty about the dog. And yet, Maisie girl" — so much breath was for Maisie only — "you see there is not a sign of a hole in the ground. What would you do about it?"

"Look for it," said Chubbuck.

"This invaluable Supernal!" grunted Krag.

He had taken his rifle from its case, and was peering up one and the other slope, questioning each bowlder that might hide a Yaqui. Chubbuck understood. Without a word the two men rode in close on either side of Maisie, yet casually, so that she saw no purpose in it, until their horses almost touched noses in front of her horse's nose. Each man recalled, hopefully, that a company of soldiers had passed the smelter a few days before, bound across the desert. The chances were that the soldiers had driven the Yaquis farther back into the mountains. Nevertheless, Maisie was dismounted in the first sheltering gully that offered, and when the burro with the coil of rope overtook them, Krag sent its driver back to camp for the rest of his peons. These

peons were old deer hunters, carefully chosen, and Krag had made them discard their muzzle-loaders for American rifles which he had borrowed from the company.

Krag and Chubbuck persuaded Maisie that she needed a rest, and exacted her promise to wait for them while they and Plácido explored for the lost mine. They did not venture far, for the desert rat was positive about certain of his landmarks. The mine was bound to be near. But when he seemed on the point of locating the spot, a something unfamiliar, he could not tell what, intervened and upset his reckoning. Then he floundered lugubriously, and asked to see the specimens again. Bun Chubbuck, for all his scoffing, commenced to share the bewildered fellow's intuition of something uncanny, when Maisie called them. Her voice carried excitement, eagerness.

They found her in her gully, kicking clods into a heap. "There, Jim," she said, pointing the toe of her boot, "there's your old mine!"

"Well, by jinks," cried Chubbuck, "by jinks! But Maisie — how in the world —— "

"Just from sitting here with nothing to do," said Maisie. "I began thinking I could *dig* a mine while you men were looking for one. So I started to dig, don't you see, with my foot, and then I struck — *that!*" Again the contemptuous little boot pointed.

Scooping out a basin in the dust and stones, she had come to a flooring of logs. She had sifted dust between the chinks until that seemed an indefinite procedure. Apparently there was no bottom underneath, and in one ecstatic second she knew that she had found the mine.

"And it'll have to be her mine, won't it, Jim?" said Bunny.

Señor!" It was Plácido's exclamation. He was smoothing the stiff black hair on his peaked cranium. "I understand at last. It was this." He indicated the little gully. "This was not here before."

"Not here! What?"

He shook his head emphatically. "No, *señor*, this *arroyo* has been fabricated. Why? To hide again this *mina tapada* that betrayed itself to your servitor."

Sharp eyes were needed, but the desert rat was telling the truth. The gully had not even been dug out. It had been *built*. Dust and rock had been carried there to raise its banks, which were graded off on either side to conform to the slope of the mountain. The same patient cunning had made the short little ditch resemble erosion by water. Its bed was covered a half-foot thick with pebbles. When these were scraped away, there was revealed a raft of logs, set into the ground even with the surface. Krag's peons pulled out these logs, and the desert rat stood, pointing down into a gaping black hole.

Chubbuck strode round to Krag. "Jim," he whispered, "I believe it's the — the *Veta Negra!*" His face was white under its blistering. "Wasn't this hole's history the history of the fabulous *Veta Negra?*" he rattled on. "Weren't there Spaniards entombed or murdered? Wasn't there a shaft filled up by Indians? Wasn't every vestige destroyed, and the secret preserved? And look here, here was this hole covered up again, the minute it shows itself after all these centuries!"

Krag laughed in the white face. "Well," he said, "we

might call her the *Veta Negra.* It would help to sell stock. But let's look first and see if we want to sell any."

"Jim," cried Maisie, "you're not going down there?" But she knew that he was.

"I ought to go, too," said Chubbuck. "I've heard that a man ought never to go into a mine alone."

"*Bunny!*" exclaimed Maisie.

Krag heeded neither of them. He knotted the rope about a log that his peons had laid across the hole. He went down hand under hand. The last he saw, before the brink of the hole shut them from his sight, was Maisie and Chubbuck peering breathlessly down at him. Maisie had to accept his daring as a matter of course, while at the suggestion of daring in Chubbuck she was horrified. But her husband did not explain so easily the tense look on her face as she leaned over and peered down at him. That look he carried with him into the dark cavern below.

The darkness thickened. His eyes saw nothing of walls or bottom. He might have been the one atom of matter poised in space, himself the universe. But his ears caught, faint and thin, a shriek overhead, and something passed him downward, stirring the dead air. It crashed and shattered on the bottom, and the cavern groaned with stifled echoes. He knew what had happened. His weight on rope and log had loosened a bit of the crust, and a slab of rock had fallen. He looked up. A head was silhouetted on the edge of the jagged patch of light. He heard Bun Chubbuck calling down, as one who dreads that he may be calling to the dead.

Krag would not answer at once. The possibilities in

his death, paradise, should first flash across Bun Chubbuck's mind. Krag knew, for all Bunny's loyal heart, that just such an elysian bower would rear itself like a fiend's mirage. He waited exactly long enough, and hallooed, as from the tomb: "Well, well, what is it?"

Abruptly he remembered Maisie. For it was Maisie who had screamed. Was she, perhaps, lying white and lifeless, and only clumsy Bun Chubbuck to bring her back to this world! Krag began climbing up again, when a second head outlined itself in the patch of light. He thrilled in gratitude to his science that had so strengthened her frail heart. He saw her arm stretching over the void, and saw Chubbuck's hand guide her hand to the rope. As she clutched it, he understood. She was assuring herself that his weight was still on it. The falling rock had not plucked him from his hold. From the golden light above, down to him in the utter night, the vibration of the rope with her hand around it came like a caress, and entered his being as a message. He did not think of that then, but he did long afterward. He saw Chubbuck's arm draw her back. He grunted, and lowered himself on down.

When he stood on the bottom, closed round by a dense mustiness like the diseased breath of earth, he lighted a candle. There were no drafts of a subterranean labyrinth to snuff it out. The one egress was the small dazzling hole sixty feet overhead through which he had come. Neither were there gases to smother the flame, or his own flame of life, since Plácido had been down here already, after borrowing all the lariats in his native village, five leagues away. Slowly the candle light grew,

and its flickering circle crawled farther out upon the darkness. The pitchy black dissolved into vague shadows, the shadows into clumsy shapes of jutting rock.

Here was the last chamber of the Spaniard's treasure house. Here their devious burrowing opened on a vaulted cathedral. This far they had followed the bonanza vein under the mountain, and here the vein had swollen big and tumorous, so that they had hollowed out the cathedral. Naked Indians had carried out these tons of rock, gangue, and ore. They had crawled and squeezed through the tunnels with it, and staggered up notched timbers with it, one sack at a time that was corpse heavy, and one sack at a time they had dropped it, with sweat and anguish, upon the earth's surface under the sun; and in Spain armadas and churches were built and upstart grandees stood covered before their king. And here was an American named Krag, to take up the tragedy where the old tragedy had left off three hundred years ago.

But Krag was not greatly interested in Spaniards. A drama some millions of years yet farther back had precedence. Compared with that, Castilian bones were his contemporaries. He slowly moved the candle over his head, bringing the feeble rays on the walls of naked rock. A page of geology lay here. It was the earth's memoirs in the original manuscript, spread in molten ink when the earth was hot with youth. Now they were tablets of stone, being read by an intruding creature under the light of a candle.

A black hole gaped in the cavern's wall. It was where the drift entered the stope. A something on the ground gleamed yellowish white. Krag recognized the

breast bone and ribs of a skeleton. It was but human to turn from earth's memoirs of millions of years to this pitifully insignificant and human document. Even Krag did so, but solely on the chance of enlightening addenda to the grander document.

The skeleton lay on its side, and the knees were ludicrously drawn to the breast like a man doubled up with a stomach ache. Thus the man had doubled up when the empty stomach was yet there. Krag bent over the relic with his candle. He touched a finger to the ground underneath. Dry dust, heavy and grease-laden, stuck to his finger. This was departed flesh, and flesh unclothed. The man had been naked in death. Only the loin cloth, rotted and drooping slack on the pelvis, marked him in dying above the beasts. He had been an Indian, one of the mine slaves, and therefore was now an unprofitable document.

Stooping, holding his candle before him, Krag stepped over the skeleton into the mouth of the drift. Another skeleton lay at his feet. A little farther on, the bones of two more were mingled. One was lying a little over the other, its bony fingers clutching at the other's throat, its teeth apparently sunk in the chalky wall of the other's fleshless chest. The living man sneered. Here was only a document of self — self *in extremis*, and again of no profit to the incarnate selfishness treading among them.

Yet farther on many more skeletons were heaped and jumbled together, like slain bodies on a battlefield. To pass them in the narrow tunnel, Krag had to squeeze close to the wall, and beyond he came into a cleared space; cleared, that is, of the mortal debris except for

one lone skeleton, which seemed yet to master the whited, cowering pack. Near it lay a rusted, broken sabre, deeply gashed from point to hilt, and in the jumbled heap of bones there were cleft skulls. Behind the lone skeleton the tunnel ended in a crush of rock and splintered timbers. At that point the wound in the earth had closed, trapping these one-time living men in their treasure chamber. He of the lone skeleton had held the spot nearest succour against the pack, and he had died victor on his futile vantage ground.

The sword is more of a document than a loin cloth can ever be. Krag knelt beside the lone skeleton. It was of the aristocracy of bones. It was accoutred in conquistador leather; in doublet, breeches, and boots. The leather parted like paper ash under the living touch, and bared the glistening frame within. The living fingers went to the belt, to a pouch there, and peeled it open. Yellow as a hag's tooth, something lay folded inside. It was parchment, enduring yet; a gesture, nod, frown, or smile, of one century to another across the chasm of time.

Krag's heavy hands smoothed out the limp folds with the gentleness of the surgeon. The dead Spaniard's breast he used for table, and spread the parchment there, centring the candle's flare on its smeared lines. The antique Castilian lettering was dim, and clouded by the wash and sop of blood long since dried. But the man who had come afterward needed no written word to interpret the gesture — whether "Yes" or "No" — of that other century. Krag knew already that the lode ran from north-west to south-east, so that it was easy to

trace understandingly the old workings on the Spaniard's chart. Krag traced them from the shaft, along the gutted vein, to the breast of the drift in the fateful stope, where the last pick had been driven in the treasure-freighted lode.

This much Krag expected to find. Every mine boss would know as much of his mine. But it was little; it was nothing. The intruder on that ancient tragedy hoped for more; expected it not, yet hoped. He bent avidly over the parchment. The hard gray eyes awoke like sleepy hounds to the scent. They darted to and fro, over and over again, across a certain parchment country that was blank. They sought to project the traced line from where, as a worked-out vein, it stopped at the face of the drift. He brought his head closer, and blew softly, to blow away what might be dust. But the specks, if such they were, held fast. Then he noted that they were orderly specks, tracking single file over the parchment. They were a dotted line, faint, and doubtful, too, like the dead treasure seeker who had set them there. They began near the stope, and did, theoretically, project the virgin lode. But, what was astounding, and rasped the geologist's soul, the tracks *bent* in their course. They bent from south-east to southward. Almost to a right angle they broke. Now what Spaniard that dead Spaniard must have been, to feel along a thread of silver from under one mountain into another mountain! To see, with his Spaniard's greed, that the thread curved within the solid mountain! Moreover, a bending vein of ore is a monstrosity in all geology. The dead Spaniard had been a very crazy live

Spaniard. So any other man than Krag must have thought.

But Krag looked farther. A little beyond its bend southward the dotted line stopped. It stopped short, or was brought to a stop, by a bold, harsh line like a stone wall in its path. That bold, harsh line pictured no shade of doubt. Did the fanciful Spaniard, then, imagine that the vein had heaved at that point? Was he dreaming of a volcanic shiver that had ruptured the vein there? If so, he was dreaming of many things under the earth. And yet, the stone wall was the boldest line on the chart. It was assertive, stubborn, and would not be denied.

There were some letters — three letters, a word — written along the bold line. They were almost illegible, but Krag made them out: "A UA." There was a blur between the first two. That halted Krag a second only. "*Agua*," he exclaimed. "Water!"

Water was as important as silver, if one would have silver of those barren mountains. The Spaniard was certain to indicate water. But again, was he imagining a stream within the earth?

In a flash of intuition Krag understood. "*Agua*" on the chart stood for the little stream they had followed up the gorge! The bold line was the gorge itself. And the vein stopped with the gorge. It outcropped somewhere on the gorge's precipitous walls. The Spaniard had discovered this outcropping, by accident, doubtless, perhaps from the summit of the opposite wall. He had identified it as the same vein. But, to outcrop there, the vein must have changed its course. Hence the doubtful bending dotted line on his chart.

Thereupon Krag thought for a long time on it. An expert examining the property would believe that the vein kept its course, which was south-eastward, and where no gorges intervened to cut it short. On that assumption, supported by all the rules of geology, the expert would recommend development. He might advise a railroad to the smelter. Only later, when the vein had been followed, would its queer twist and quick end be known. There was a chance here to lose a great deal of money.

Krag thought of Bunny. Bunny was quite sure that this was the *Veta Negra*. But Bunny forgot the grateful Yaqui, the Mexican widow, and the famous chunk of silver ore that Humboldt saw.

That episode had happened a hundred years ago. But this mine was buried three hundred years ago, and had stayed buried too deep for any Yaqui, no matter how grateful a Yaqui.

"Still" — Krag took up the candle, and got to his feet — "anything not to disappoint Bunny. The *Veta Negra* it is. Furthermore, as thoughtful Bunny reminds me, it is Maisie's mine. We will defer to thoughtful Bunny."

He held the parchment to the candle flame, and the ashy flakes wavered down upon the aristocrat of the charnel house. Then, back in the stope, he dug specimens from the richest seam in the breast of the lode, filled a canvas ore sack with them, tied the sack and his pick to the rope, and signaled to them above to draw up the rope.

When they lowered the rope to him again, he climbed as buoyantly as though his bonanza were genuine.

CHAPTER SIX

Worthy Wolf

DO YOU think there's any danger — what *would* be danger — to *him?*" asked Maisie. Peering down, she saw his candle moving about, and vanish, as though it were pinched out. "Is there, Bunny? Is there? He's in that tunnel now, I think. There's only the darkness."

Chubbuck gazed on her where she knelt, braced by her stiffened arms at the very edge. The slender neck was as pretty in its tan, perhaps, as it had been in soft alabaster. Its curve, from her shoulder to the first maddening little curls, was anxiety's line. Her one thought was for the man below, and Bunny knew it. He laid his forearm across his brow as if he were perspiring.

"There can't be, Maisie," he said. "I was talking to Plácido. Jim can't go more than a few steps into the tunnel before the cave-in stops him. And there's no shafts to fall into."

"But I wish he hadn't gone, Bunny. And I wish *I* might do something to frighten *him*, and," she whispered, to herself, "make him wonder, as he makes me. Jim! Jim, dear!" So she thought of him, and her heart, bolder than her lips, kept the words.

"Maisie."

She looked over her shoulder. Bunny's voice was strange. He was staring fixedly down the ravine. His old briar pipe, poised half-way from his mouth, trembled in his hand. His lips were parted. Maisie could not see outside the gully, being on her knees, so that she did not see Plácido and the peons intent on the same direction, silently watching, with their rifles ready.

"Maisie, is he there? Look again. Do you see his candle?"

"No, Bunny. Not yet. Why?"

"Maybe — maybe you'd better call him. — Yes, *loud!* — No, no, you needn't . . . God, they're only soldiers!"

Fourteen drooping soldiers and a sub-lieutenant were toiling up the ravine. Down in the gorge they had seen burros browsing around the half unpacked camp. Maisie's tube of tooth paste had fallen out of her saddle bags, and by that they knew that the camp belonged to Americans. The battered soldiers, what was left of them, were coming out of the fastnesses of the sierra. The trickling stream in the gorge was their last chance this side the smelter to fill their canteens.

The soldiers had a prisoner. They pulled on the chains from his wrists, and when the prisoner swayed they wearily pushed him headlong, so that the momentum of his lurch gained them a few steps. If he fell they roused him by kicks, or the sub-lieutenant with his sword point. If that failed, for the captive was weak, they took him by arms and ankles, and dragged him. Thus they were exerting themselves greatly for a trophy.

Captives in that warfare were permissibly shot instanter. But if one stumps one's toes on a clod of gold, one burdens himself with the clod. Likewise with a Yaqui. The sub-lieutenant was a gem of a sportsman. They might not believe him at the barracks. They could always shoot the Yaqui afterward.

They had caught their Yaqui the day before, when they were returning from the chase after Yaquis. It was near the place of their first skirmish, outgoing. They had tracked him by blood. Their scout, of wary eyesight, had picked up a mesquite pod. It lay a dozen feet off the trail, but against the brown he had seen a smear of rust, and knew it for a dried drop of blood. The others crouched involuntarily, fingering their Mausers. The scout did not at once follow the sign, but came back to the trail. There was a little patch of dust in the trail at this point. He stooped and gently rubbed his palm into the dust. He rose and showed his hand to the lieutenant. Dust was sticking to it, and the dust was reddish. A pool of blood had been covered over there. They took hope. That the stained mesquite pod had not been covered proved that the wounded Yaqui was ebbing fast. But they kept their Mausers cocked.

They found him in a clump of *ocotillo* where he had crawled, thrusting into the thorns with his naked shoulder. His rifle was not on him. They had not hoped to find that. His body was lifting as by knotted ropes, and falling when the ropes slacked. The one sound of his mouth was the bubbling of froth. His wound, furrowed raggedly and deep along the thigh, was alive

and horrible. They fixed chains on him before they put mescal to his lips.

Maisie stood in the gully. She made out the fourteen soldiers and the sub-lieutenant, and then the prisoner, staggering, falling, and being beaten. Her lip quivered.

"That — that's something they must not do! Oh, call Jim! — *Jim!*"

"Wait, Maisie, wait! I —— " Bunny left her. He went running on his gangling legs down the ravine. Soon she saw him protesting to the sub-lieutenant, helping his Spanish with indignant gesture. The little sub-lieutenant wanted to be accommodating, but he was puzzled. Was it that the *señor* desired that he cease employing his officer's sabre in the discharge of his duty to his *patria*, no? The flat of his officer's sabre had just left the Yaqui's naked back. Chubbuck pointed helplessly at Maisie. The *señorita* — But the lieutenant comprehended. Of course, of course, the *señorita* did not wish to see. He would desist. His men would desist. Because of the *señorita* they would carry their Indian, their desperate young *bronco*, in their arms. So it should be.

"But why come at all?" Chubbuck demanded. He would save Maisie the horror of the Yaqui. "Why ——"

"We thought," said the officer, "that you might have mescal, or wheesky. We have used all our own on this mad dog which I have captured. And there remains the desert. We —— "

"Bunny," said Maisie, coming up with him, "tell them that Jim is a surgeon. This poor, wild, wounded creature —— "

"Of course," said Bunny. "I never thought."

The lieutenant was courteously pleased. A surgeon was better than wheesky. A surgeon would make his trophy whole. The lieutenant saw enhancement of renown at the barracks. To capture a reasonably sound Yaqui was somewhat.

"Why not," said Maisie, emboldened by compassion, "have him brought to our gully, and let one of the men go after Jim's valise — it's back at camp, in the green striped blanket — and have it all ready? Quick now, hurry!"

They were hardly back in the gully with the wounded Yaqui, when the rope dangling in the hole began to jerk and rap against the cross beam to which it was tied.

"Prospecting, no?" said the lieutenant genially. "*Ai*, the great hole!" he exclaimed, and looked quickly at the Yaqui. But the Indian's metal-bright, fevered eyes betrayed nothing. "Yes, yes," said the lieutenant, "it was from here that they first shot at us, when we numbered as yet all of fifty-seven. And why? They were keeping a watch on this hole. *Ai, señor,*" — he opened his arms eloquently at Chubbuck — "you are not the strategist. You do not therefore perceive. But I, yes. The Yaquis want no rich mines to be found in this sierra. Why? *Pobre,* you are not the strategist. Because, mines will bring a railroad across the desert, and a railroad will bring armies. *Ai*, yes, *señor mio,* and we foot-blistered soldiers of the *patria* do hope that you now have found a very rich mine. So it should be."

Chubbuck had drawn up Krag's sack of specimens from the hole and was dumping them on the ground. "Rich?" he said. "Heft that, then. Or that. Or that."

He piled black sulphides on the Mexican's palm. They weighed almost what solid silver would have weighed. "Rich?" sniffed Bunny. The virus, which is the same whether silvered or gilded, coursed through his veins. The man below had sent up before him, not the human document, but this other of geology — rocks — a subtle lie in her eternal truth.

It was Maisie who thought to lower the rope again.

No one had been noticing the Yaqui, but it was the Yaqui, lying half propped up on blankets spread for him by Maisie, that Krag noticed first of all, when his large head and dull gray eyes rose out of the hole. The Indian was young, but his apathy was supreme, despite the wasting of his corded frame, the thirst on his swollen tongue, the pain of the festered wound, despite even his shackles. Only the black opals that were his eyes seemed alert, yet they were still, like a desert viper's when the viper lies coiled. They were on Chubbuck as Chubbuck fondled the treasure-laden rocks.

And so the eyes encountered Krag's, as a great yellowed hand, streaked with candle grease, reached out of the black hole and closed over the rope, and cords in the wrist strained like cables, and this other man's eyes of steel rose into the light, blinking as though behind a crack in a plank, yet holding the Indian's own. It was as when the viper sees a boulder loosen and begin to roll, at first very slowly, down the mountain side toward him. The Yaqui in no way comprehended the uneasiness that grew on him.

Maisie trembled at the edge until Krag stood safely beside her.

"Brought me a patient, I see," said Krag, turning to the sub-lieutenant.

"If the *señor*," begged the officer, "will but give him legs enough for the desert."

"Or to run away," added Krag. He noted the Yaqui's lean figure, the clean, noble lines of a runner.

"But I captured him, *señor*," protested the little officer.

"Very well," said Krag, "yet I mention again that he will run away."

"Jim," said Maisie, "he's suffering. Here's your telescope case, everything."

"But your claim, Jim?" Bun Chubbuck interposed. "Aren't you going to denounce it?"

"Why, yes," said Krag. "Can't you and Plácido stake her off?"

"Sure," said Bunny. "But there are no surface signs. How'll we run the lines?"

Krag was laying out glittering instruments on a cloth of black velvet. "The vein," he said, without looking up, "runs south-east from the stope."

"That's easy. How far shall we follow her?"

"Suit yourself, old Supernal. Take in a hundred *pertenencias*, if you like." He squinted along the edge of a long, thin knife. He was reflecting on law, not on cutlery. Mexico had no law of the apex. A miner could take only what lay between his lines. The vein, twisting, would quickly pass under Bunny's south side-line. Knife in hand, Krag turned to the Yaqui. "Now, my *vale coyote*," he said affably.

The Yaqui's eyes darted to the knife. It was their

refuge from this white man's eyes. He had feared that he might flinch, but, looking on the material steel, he would not flinch.

Krag did not use the knife. He put it down, first for a hypodermic syringe, and then to let Maisie pour an antiseptic wash on cotton swabs. His fingers worked along the wound's jagged furrow, now touching lightly, now pressing. Between him and his patient there grew a sort of contest, a silent, instinctive duel of two naked natures. The young warrior lay, opposing his Indian will. Krag was half smiling, in that strange affection he had for the wild, persisting things of the desert. Smiling, he pressed, quick and sharp. The Yaqui's body lifted, all but head and heels, from the ground. His jaws snapped open. It was an intake of breath, a sucking for mercy of the universe outside since within himself he did not suffice. The soldiers drew back, and laughed, admiringly — they had not been able to do that. But the yelp of agony was still-born, though the Indian knew himself beaten. He had recognized the empire of pain. He swept his manacled fists into the white man's face. Krag took the blow, smiling. The Yaqui lay still then, gazing up at him, while heavenly surcease of pain went stealing through his body. After a little his head rolled over on one lean jaw and he slept.

"Now, Maisie girl, some gauze."

Maisie had the bandages ready, unrolling them as they passed through her husband's fingers. Krag felt her nearness to him at such times, and he was deeply sensitive of it. Especially so, because these were the only

times. Why his work, and not the cradle, nor his love, nor hers, should draw her to him, he did not know; or rather, he dreaded to know. His intuition of it dismayed him; more, embittered him. For here were these others, soldiers and peons, callous and pachyderm lumps with no more feeling for surgical nicety than of needlework, yet, like his sweet wife, held by him at his work as by the lodestar. His thick brows narrowed. He sensed the cause, not confessing it. They, peons, soldiers, his wife, humanity, had an instinctive antipathy for the cold blooded creatures, for creatures without the grace to know suffering. Begot of such antipathy was fascination, enthralling warm blood despite itself. Krag pondered. Was that, then, the spell of him at work, when his raw material was mortal suffering?

Maisie wondered, also, but with less discernment. Often she lingered at the closed door of the smelter hospital when he was operating, although he would not let her enter. It was not the horror of the scientist's sacrilege in the temple of life, at least not that alone, that held her; but with that, this man's, her husband's, cynical power over life and death. His conquest of suffering but deepened his sneer for poor mortality. At times Maisie almost prayed that he might fail. She would cure the healer himself in a little humility. Only a little humility, and she thought that perhaps — just possibly — she could make out whether it was that she hated him or that she loved him. For this had come to be the enigma and anguish of her life; this harassing riddle as to which emotion she was the slave. That she was a slave she knew quite well. And now, here in the Mexican wilder-

ness, she had seen an Indian likewise falling a slave under his hand; or was it? — yes — under his eye. Her husband was the master animal. Maisie felt strangely cold as she unrolled the last of the gauze.

"There," said Krag, "he's patched. But you will either have to leave him, shoot him, or carry him."

The sub-lieutenant thought of the desert, yet decided to carry him. He rigged up a litter, accepted Krag's invitation to camp fare, and would not be denied in a wish to escort the Americans back to the smelter. On the weary way he detailed his men by fours to bear the trophy.

They reached the smelter late at night, and the soldiers were exhausted and close to mutiny. If they might rest at the smelter till morning? Krag warned them as to their prisoner. He had heard that a Yaqui could always escape. The sub-lieutenant laughed easily. A room with barred windows, or without, it did not matter; his men should sit over the Indian with levelled rifles. It was Chubbuck who suggested the hospital. And there the Yaqui was laid and two sleepy guards with carbines sat on the wooden bench. Krag bade the sub-lieutenant good-night.

The next morning at daybreak, when the squad roused to take up the march to town, the Yaqui was gone.

CHAPTER SEVEN

Legacies

"JIM." Maisie spoke his name almost timidly. She did not fear her interruption would annoy him, for it never did, nor that his head would lift from his work with a frown, since he had never frowned at her yet, or because of her. She sometimes wished that he might. This perpetual calm was a cloak, while a lightning flash might reveal her husband to her and bring understanding. Nevertheless, she spoke his name timidly.

He brushed aside the papers — charts, blue prints, official documents stamped by the government; all the final papers of his mining claim spread out before him on their plank library table — and by his quiet gesture told her that the moment following, or any other period of his life, was her own if she cared to ask for it.

"Well?"

Maisie was looking over his shoulder, rather bewildered by the formidable scrolls whose magic was a license to dig and possess treasure. She took courage. His word of question was tender. She could not know how terribly so it was.

"Jim, you're going to be rich now, aren't you?"

"Am I?" He felt her nearness to him. His gnarled

being was as sensitive to that as a leaf bud to the morning. His shoulder ached for the resting of her hand there, and she was wishing that it was — was *possible* — to put her arm around his neck. "Why so?" he asked.

"Why!" she exclaimed: "because you have a mine, of course!"

"Poorer, you mean. But since our last raise, maybe we can afford just one mine."

"Aren't you," she asked, "going to let Bunny get rich too?"

Krag mocked himself for hoping for the weight of her hand on his shoulder. So his possible riches interested her that the Bunny person might share them!

But the specialist in the human heart was quite mistaken. Maisie took it for granted that Jim would be rich sometime. To wish him luck did not seem necessary. On the other hand, not only to wish luck, but to inspire it, did seem necessary for poor Bunny, if that good friend to them both were ever to have reward.

"Aren't you?" she repeated, for his great, squared head was on his chest, and she thought him deep in other thoughts. "You know, Jim, to make Bunny rich?"

"You mean, to make him poorer, the innocent Chub!"

"Please, Jim." She sighed despairingly at his humour.

"But it's not a joke, Maisie. It's ruin. For Chub it is. Still, as he's secretary of our mining company, I've given him ten thousand dollars' worth of stock."

"Jim Krag!" The blue eyes opened gloriously on him, could he have seen them. "Jim — ten thousand dollars — *ruin?*"

"Exactly, Maisie girl. It's assessable. Old Supernal gets a *vara*."

"What's that?"

"A Mexican stock term." Then he explained. "You see, we're a Mexican company. We've incorporated the Mexican way. There are twenty-five *varas* of stock. One *vara* is non-assessable, which goes to Plácido as his prospector's share. But all the other twenty-four are assessable. A *vara* is one hundred shares, and the par value of a share is one hundred dollars. Dear Bunny gets ten thousand dollars' worth."

"But Jim ——"

He shook his head. She knew what that meant, and waited.

"For every dollar of stock," he went on, "there will have to be another dollar, real money, to build a railroad, install machinery, and dig. Dollar for dollar, only for a starter. Bunny's *vara*, will cost him ten thousand dollars. Now where is Bunny going to get it? Where's a destitute beggar who "— he looked hard at the table, his ugly smile jerking his lips — "who handles the smelter's cash! — where is *he* going to get ten thousand dollars? List, the echo, Maisie girl. Where?"

"But Jim, if that is so, where can you either? How many — what you call 'em — have you?"

"All the rest. Twenty-three."

"Let's see, that's "— her red lips fluttered industriously — "oh, I always did hate mental arithmetic!"

"Two hundred and thirty thousand dollars, Maisie."

She gasped. "Jim Krag, you can never, never ——"

"Hardly. I'd have to sell some of my stock."

"Oh, *now* I see!" She clapped her hands in delight at her deep penetration. "*Of* course, then with what you sell you can pay — that hateful business; assessments — on what you don't sell."

She pondered a moment behind puckered brows and her former timidity returned. It was at once apparent that this hesitating manner had no connection with Bun Chubbuck.

"Jim." The appealing stress was there again. "Jim, dear," and now her hand, both hands, fell on his shoulders, "this stock that you must sell, why not sell it to — to papa. Oh Jim," she hastened on tempestuously, "if only you *would* let him help, instead of strangers! And it's not like asking favours, Jim. It's giving him a chance to get richer, isn't it, and he would get richer, wouldn't he, for helping you? Don't you see, Jim? Then why not let him? And Jim . . . Jim ——"

But the words dragged at the prayer in her heart. She could not say it all. She could not tell him that she saw in his necessity a way to his reconciliation with her father. Least of all could she tell him of her more intimate hope, that his bitterness must then perish, that perhaps he would find again his better self, left so far behind with his lost boyhood. She could not say all that, but if Jim would only let her father help, at least that would be the start. "Jim," she whispered, "won't you, Jim?"

He had risen at mention of her father, the act brushing her hands from his shoulders, and she shrank a little away from him. She hoped, when he should turn from the table, that she would not have to meet his eyes. He was lifting the papers from the table and laying them

down again, one by one, in business-like deliberation. He found one that he wanted, a single sheet of stamped paper, and kept it in his hand as he turned and faced her. She looked up, and she could scarcely believe. The dull, tired eyes were soft. They were *kind*, so very kind, as they were the night in the trapper's cabin on Cleft Rock. The tears welled blindingly in her own eyes.

"Maisie girl" — the hard, cool voice had changed to a note of sorrow — "Maisie, it happens that you are going to have a great deal to think about. A great deal, Maisie. And soon. Very soon, indeed, Maisie."

"*Jim!* . . . Why — Jim, dear!" She was staring at him.

He shook his head. She was not to interrupt. "And Maisie, when you come to do this thinking," he said very slowly, "and you see your happiness, then, Maisie girl" — he paused; his look, his manner, were the solemnity of command — "then *clutch it!* Grip it, hard and fast. Snatch it as your due, girl: as your due from Heaven, or whatever: as the due you owe your life's years yet to be spent on earth — Now, Maisie girl, do you think you can remember, when this thinking time comes?"

"Jim, I don't understand! What ——"

"Now as to your father," he interrupted abruptly. She started. It was the first time she had heard him speak of her father deliberately. He was, moreover, quite passionless. But she took no hope from that. Something — a presentiment, perhaps — was making her tremble. She could better endure the old silence. The very air seemed freighted with consequence to-

night. "Your father," he said, — "and here's at least one item to be on my credit side — I give you your father's respect. Why?" The shade of a sneer crossed his lips. "Because I — you — we are synonymous with twenty-three *varas* — two hundred and thirty thousand dollars. You will be very welcome, little girl and little mother, on your next visit home. You won't be treated there again as you have been, as my — my mother was. He will toady to you now — yes, twenty-three *varas* worth!"

She listened, amazed. How could he know of her treatment in her father's house, during her visit there? She had never admitted even to herself that there was a difference in her father's manner toward her. Yet she had felt it at the time, and now she knew it for the truth — her father's contempt for her as a poor man's wife. She recalled incidents, when adroitly her father had cut under her naïve pride in merely being alive, and took the spirit out of her, and made her feel small, dependent, inferior. He had patronized her with questions about her "home" over the mess house, about Jim's salary and prospects. His brows had lifted, noting her simple dresses and simplest of hats. His very greeting, curious, cold, suspicious, had been a supercilious expectancy of a claim on his bounty. There had been many things to start the tears. Every corner in the wealth-reeking Queen Anne house was a brazen contrast to exact humility. But Maisie had owned to the truth in none of these incidents, and all together they had not made her one in sympathy with her husband, so that her husband's chief hope in sending her there had

withered miserably. And now he was making her see what his mind's eye had seen — her father, the man Hacklette. But in his gentleness for her he would not force her to spoken assent.

"There," he said, "none of that rot will happen again. Next trip, what you don't like, buy and burn up. You'll have your mine."

"My mine, Jim?"

"Yes, the *Veta Negra*. You found it. The Bunny person said you ought to have it." He opened the paper in his hand. "Here it is," and he handed her the paper.

She looked at it, and made nothing of it, except that it was stiff and crinkly, with formal penmanship, and made her think of her high-school diploma.

"It's a power of attorney," Krag explained. "That will protect you better than actual ownership. And there," he pointed to a block of lithographs on the table, "are my shares, your shares, twenty-three *varas* of the *Veta Negra;* par value, two hundred and thirty thousand dollars, gold. You can sell them, or keep them. The power of attorney lets you do all that in my name, but," he said, "there's one restriction. Not a share must be sold for less than par, and for cash down,"

"Par?" she questioned.

He explained "par."

She listened, wondering if she were dizzy. "Oh, you keep it, Jim," she cried. "I don't want any mine. Please, Jim. There's so — so much *thinking*, and I don't even know what the words mean."

He made no answer. She started to protest again.

Still he waited. She was not saying the right thing. She stopped protesting, dubious. He waited for her. Slowly her brow cleared. There was a dimple, another, like the stars coming out, but the stars were not comparable to the growing gladness in her eyes. . . . *Of* course! Jim did not want to go himself to her father for help. But, to please her, he was willing to accept such help. She had won! She had won! He would let *her* go. That was why he gave her the mine.

"May I," she asked, to be real sure, "may I sell some *varas* to papa?"

"If you don't," said Krag, "he'll take them away from you."

Her face clouded plaintively. "Then you want me to leave you again, to go on another visit home?"

"Time enough to decide that, Maisie girl, when you come to do the thinking I mentioned."

She let that mystery pass. "And you don't really mind if — if papa helps! . . . Oh, Jim!"

The impulse was overpowering. She flung herself into his arms. And quailed, when she found herself there.

He knew of old that flinching in his clasp — a clasp passive, that had not tightened — and it decided him beyond recall. A first joy died on his face, leaving the corpse of joy, and the man's loneliness. He looked down at the head nestled on his breast, yet lifting, drawing away. His palms, laid on her shoulder, on her waist, tingled. It was an ache, a hunger reaching to the muscles of his arms, travelling to his heart; it was the pain-sense of a void. Her body throbbed against him. It was warm. A flush passed in waves over her

neck. Her hair brushed his face. The subtle fragrance of it was in his nostrils. There was a demand of the sensuous in him for this one and dearest woman; the sensuous of a thick-set, rugged, robust animalism, galvanized by fiery tenderness. Though of the body, it was inexplicably one with the soul, too. He knew it for no other woman, for none that he could imagine or dream of. It was the sensuousness of the monogamist, which cleansed passion of fleshly taint. But he was denied. Her impulse, he remembered, was because of her father; an impulse of gratitude. He accepted that for the truth, and went on to do that which he had planned to do.

"No," he said, "I don't really mind; — at par."

There was a rumbling knock on their outer door, at the head of the stairs.

"That will be the Bunny person," said Krag.

Maisie's ears were quick for another note. "The clumsy thing," she said, much provoked, "now he's wakened the baby!"

She hurried into the next room, and Krag opened the door to Bun Chubbuck.

"Got your vacation at last, eh, Chub? When you going?"

"Next month." He was glowing at the prospect.

"Don't be coy when you get home. The *News* and *Javelin* might like to interview you about the *Veta Negra*, you know."

"Sure they will. It's a big story, Jim; finding an old hidden treasure house that way, and the skeletons, and the centuries that have passed, and ——"

"People's tongues will be hanging out to lap up your stock, Chub. Fill your trunk with specimens."

"But I won't sell," protested Chub. "I'm going to keep my stock, all I can. I want to be rich, Jim. I s'pose the kids at home have been growing all this time, and if they could go on to college, maybe — Hello, there's Honey Bunch. Looks like somebody's gone and woke her up."

"Somebody certainly did," said Maisie, bringing in the little lady. "Bunny, why *can't* you knock in more of a whisper?"

"Oh, well, Chub," said Krag, "don't grieve. It's life, getting woke up. Death, when we don't."

"Now I think that's gloomy, by jinks!" said Bunny.

"Not at all." Krag smiled on him. "Snatching at happiness" — the smile ended in a click of teeth— "now, that's being awake. Was just trying to wake up Maisie there."

Chubbuck gazed helplessly from one to the other. Maisie was as bewildered as himself.

"Told her," Krag went on ruthlessly, "when she sees her happiness, to snatch it, pin it down. Only way. Butterflies will fly; their nature. I — I say, Mr. Chubbuck," he turned on the amazed Bunny, "that might apply to you, you know. Why not? General proposition, you know. Remember, anyhow. When *you* see it, grab quick, especially — especially if it means as well the happiness of others, or of one other. For I suppose," he added, robbing the last of hidden significance, for Chubbuck had reddened, not knowing why, before the rigid glare of the eyes under the thick brows, "that

happiness is a bargain — out of the supernal box, say — and it takes two, at least two, to make happiness. And when two *can* make it, then it is a real bargain, Chub, and cheap at any price, whether paid here, in Heaven, hell, or the grave. . . . By the way, Maisie girl, I've got a call this evening. I may be late getting back, so don't wait for me." He stopped, paused; seemed to be measuring the seconds of his pause. "So don't wait for me," he repeated.

He moved about the little room, gathering up his hat, his medicine case, his rawhide quirt, his cartridge belt, and revolver. In the inner room, on his dresser, there was a small hand mirror. He slipped it in his coat pocket. His shaving mirror hung on the window casing. That also he slipped in his pocket. As he moved about, his walk stiffened. His heavy, gaunt frame seemed to be hardening, as a man who prepares to strain against a great weight. His upper jaw was set in the lower. His being was locked fast in corded ropes. But when he came to his wife, his manner was casual. He made it so.

"Well, Honey Bunch, night-night." He held out his hands for the baby.

But she, looking at him unafraid for the space of a second, suddenly twisted in her mother's arms, and flung out her own dimpled ones to Bunny. Splotches of purple mottled the father's cheek and brow. He caught her to him, buried his mouth against her neck, and let the savage pressure of his lips rest there until she had screamed quite her loudest. Then he handed her back to . . . he changed his mind. He handed her to Chubbuck.

Chubbuck, very red of face, turned with the baby, and walked out in the hall.

"Now you, Maisie," said Krag.

But Maisie was petulant about the treatment of Honey Bunch. She puckered her lips indifferently to his lips. "You, too!" he muttered, and took her. He held her long, his face buried against her neck. He did not look at her again when he let her go.

"All right, Chub," he said, joining Chubbuck in the hall outside, who returned to the doorway and gave the baby to Maisie. He then followed Krag with some resolution, with intent strong on him.

"Look here, Jim," he demanded, once they were down the stairs of the mess house and outside, "what is it? What's the meaning of all this?" — he heard the click of teeth that ended a smile. "Eh, what ——"

"Go on, Bunny. What's what?"

Bunny sighed. He fell in with Krag's steps across the compound toward the gate. He laid a hand on Krag's shoulder, dimly surprised that it took courage to do that.

"You were driving at something, Jim," he said, "with that devil's own talk about happiness. You drive at something with every breath, for that matter. You don't want to tell me what it is? All right. I'll wait till some act of yours jolts me bolt upright and I see your meaning as clear and cruel and cynical as sunlight on midnight assassination. But you brought me into it, up there just now, and intruding or not, I'm in it long enough to say this ——"

"Old Supernal," grunted the man at his side.

"I am thinking of Maisie back there, Jim ——"

"Eh, are you though?"

"If you struck her, Jim, she would look like she did to-night. Like she looks so often."

"Is there much more of this damned oration?"

"And I am thinking of you, too, Jim, and ——"

"For the Lord's sake, then, cut out the stage fright."

"And thinking of you both, I want to say this, Jim. I find that consideration of the feelings of others is the best philosophy of personal happiness."

"You poor old doddering sissy!"

"I — I want you to try it, old — old chap."

"Oh, well, Chub," said Krag in contemptuous tolerance, "speaking only humanly — not supernally, mind — we may go on giving, and giving, and giving? That's your idea? But what if we humans are diabolical enough to hunger for some return? And not getting it, the devil in us acknowledges a hunger of the soul, and he holds to the province and dignity of Lucifer to strike, to hurt, as *he* is hurt? Eh, Bunny? — Oh, well, as I say, be as Christ-like as you like. That's all right. Very pretty, too."

Chubbuck drew away. "God," he cried, "what *is* your heart? Stone?"

"Why no," said Krag gravely, "it's living tissue. It's an ulcer."

"A bad heart," said Bunny, "when — when you admit it."

"Maybe so, Chub. And you'll notice I'm not trying to disabuse your mind about my being a loathsome hyena. Believe it, Chub. Maybe that's another thing

I'm driving at. . . . Hello, here we are at the smoke stack. Light a match. Or did you notice already this hieroglyphic picture, here on the side? Somebody smeared it on with red clay."

"Yes," said Chubbuck dully. The palpable change of subject, he felt, was but a sardonic grimace at his sense of defeat. "I noticed it this morning."

"Make anything out of it?"

"Some peon kid trying to draw a man in a foot race, I suppose."

"But," persisted Krag, satanically intent on exasperating the other with this trifle, "imagine now; what if it were picture writing? An Aztec message, say. How'd you translate it?"

"Oh, I don't know. I'm going to bed. I'm — tired."

"Wait. Wouldn't you read it something like this: 'Come a-running?'"

"I suppose so. Good night."

"Good night," said Krag, hard and short.

CHAPTER EIGHT

A Long, Long Job

THE next morning's sun found Krag in mid-desert, a solitary horseman plodding on and on toward the purpled silhouette of mountain range. From his horse's tail dangled the rope of one drooping led horse, which laboured through the sand under blanketed bales.

Krag had made up his bundles the night before, alone in the smelter hospital. Roughest clothing, instruments, drugs, went into them. He chose mustard plasters sparingly. Morphine, the sedative, had obviously supplanted them in his pharmacopœia. An afterthought; he scribbled his resignation from the smelter's employ, and left it, weighted by a quinine bottle, on his dust-covered desk.

On the desert, as he rode, himself and horse a gray-yellowed, sand-swept, scarcely moving speck, he seemed to amuse himself from time to time, but queerly, uncannily, as when a man mutters to himself. His amusement, if that is the word, was this:

He drew from his pocket the little hand mirror, rubbed off the coating of dust with his sleeve, rested it on his saddle horn, and bent, until he encountered his reflection in the glass. Minutes passed as he gazed steadily

on his own face. He might have been deep in an abstruse book.

The first time that morning when he bethought himself of the mirror, the ugly smile drew down the corner of his mouth, and in the glass he saw the smile mocking him. Abruptly he spat, the venom smearing the glass between the two faces.

"It *is* a black heart," he said slowly. "It's *there*, the black heart, in my eyes, on my mouth, where all the world may see. Even my baby girl ——"

He seized the mirror, swung it over his head, as if to hurl it and shatter the image that was there no longer. But he laughed horridly in self-contempt. He brought the mirror again before him. The image of quicksilver and the visage of flesh held one another fixedly. Slowly the sinister creases between the steel-gray eyes grew less deep. Slowly the hard jaw slacked, and the lips parted, as if to smile. But it was benevolence in caricature; grotesque, diabolic, and uglier by far than the old warped smile.

The man vented a low grunt, a token as near despair as his gnarled soul ever boded forth. He dropped the mirror in his pocket, and gravely shook his head.

"It's going to be a long, long job," he thought. Then, to the long, long job, he summoned the resolution and the patience that those two things meant in him.

Now and again throughout the day's weary journeying, when his features set rigid, and his lower jaw locked over the upper, and he was deepest in his black thoughts, he would suddenly remember, and take out the mirror, and hold it unflinching until each cruel line in the reflected

image softened, though the visage became flabby and disgusting in its hypocrisy. Then he put the mirror away. His patience did not break again. This was the beginning of the long, long job.

By late afternoon he was in the noble cañon where he and Maisie and Chubbuck had made camp, and where their camp had been he spread his blankets.

From any sheltered rock, from any bush behind him, above him, or on the stupendous cliffs opposite, a rifle ball might have taken him neatly. But he did not lift his gaze to either rock, or bush, or cliff. He was as in his own house, as though aware of every object about him. Yet he had reason to be sure that eyes were on him, and that the eyes were behind a gun barrel. Notwithstanding, the first thing he did, after unburdening, staking, and feeding his tired horses, was to lay his fire-arms — two rifles and a pistol — a distance from his blankets, where in case of surprise during the night he could reach them with difficulty, if at all. He threw off his coat, revealing himself in woollen shirt, breeches foxed with chamois, and laced boots. An unconcerned, dauntless figure, and unarmed, he busied himself kindling a fire for his supper. He poured aguardiente in a hollowed rock, lighted it, and therein boiled four eggs. He ate them with tortillas warmed on the coals. That done, he lay on his stomach, thrust his face in the little mountain stream, and drank. He slept the night through without stirring. When Krag slept, he slept for the purpose of sleeping.

On awakening, without a glance to note if his fire-arms were where he had left them, he cooked and ate his

breakfast, and rose to his feet. He put his hands to his mouth, and trumpeted forth:

"*Coyote!— Vale Coyote!*"

The echoes reverberated in distant nooks of the cañon. He waited until the last had died away, and put up his hands again. Behind him some one touched his elbow.

"Well, Coyote," said Krag.

First he pressed his fingers tips between his brows, rubbing out the furrows of a scowl. Then he turned and beheld his Yaqui. The lithe young warrior was naked except for loin cloth. The white *serape* of a runner lay over one arm. Lean as a timber wolf, of stringy, supple muscles; erect, sleek, clean; breathing free, poised as for instant motion, he stood like an Olympian victor in bronze; and Krag, contemplating him, smiled fondly.

The taunting glee on the savage's face vanished. He had hoped to startle the white man.

"I wait here, three days," the Yaqui spoke chidingly, as the proud host of a laggard guest.

"So?" said Krag. "I waited almost, to call twice." He extended his hand. There was something of insult in the gesture, and the curl of his lip confirmed it. His whole demeanour goaded the Indian to spurn the offered hand. The savage hesitated, his fingers playing restively over the lock of his rifle. Krag waited and watched him with that twisted smile, as a trainer watches and loves the snarling leopard who will in the end obey. The cold, calm, confident waiting compelled at last. In a sudden impulse of affection that was itself ferocity, the Yaqui took Krag's hand. For the white man the clasp was

the coiling of a snake. For the Indian it was the bruise of granite.

"Peace, my Vale Coyote," said Krag. "Four mornings since, I saw your sign of a running man on the great stack. But there was work yet. I had a loaf to bake." He swept a hand up the ravine, toward the old Spanish mine, the spurious *Veta Negra*. "The babes must eat when I am gone. Now I am here. I am alone."

The Indian bared his teeth in a sudden, gleaming smile. He knew the white man was alone. While the white man slept, he had made sure. He and his tribe, deceived down the centuries, trusted no alien, nor yet this one, who had saved him from a Mexican holiday, and spoke his language. That chamber of magic and this white man's temple of pain, which was the Indian's prison house for one night, had filled during that night with fumes, stifling his wearied guards under a sleep like death; yet the captive had awakened, and he was breathing air like the air on the highest peaks, only the air was in a bag, and cleared his head and exhilarated his being and made his limbs as springs of steel; and this white man, the wizard of that chamber, had led him by the hand until they were beyond the smelter walls, and there had loosed him on the wide world, giving him a saddled horse for flight. But the man of those black arts had asked of him nothing, only the making of a sign on the great stack after the moon should wane and fill again. The ways of this white man were inscrutable. It might be that he had loosed one wounded bird as a decoy to trap the flock. Whatever the strange riddle, the young Indian would bate no jot of arrogance to put a question.

Doctor Krag, adept in the human heart, knew as much already. "You ask me why I come, Coyote?"

"I? I did not speak."

"And what I wish, Coyote?"

The bead-like eyes wavered.

"Peace, peace," said Krag, "you do not need to speak. My wish, then, is to dwell among worthy wolves. You will take me to your people, Coyote."

The coppery lips bared the teeth for an instant, but with that the Yaqui's surprise had passed.

Krag thought of him as a superb pet. Moreover, Krag's affection for his people was real. White men had long since driven the Yaquis from docility to bloodthirst. Enduring through generations, the bloodthirst grew into instinct. And purpose that touched instinct, varying as little as the herding of wolves to bring down a foe, was, in Krag's thought, an admirable thing.

The admirable thing was even then whetting the young barbarian's fancy. He believed he saw a feast of torture, the zest of the warrior elders and old women, the expectancy and delight of children, when this prince of pain, who had wrung the homage of a smothered gasp from a Yaqui, should himself come to resist Yaqui fire and Yaqui art, and writhe, surely, at the last. The feast would be a rare one. A bright crimson tip of tongue darted forth, touching the coppery lips.

Krag saw the murderous lust plainly. "If I choose," he said, "I will keep your people's graves waiting for them. Remember, Coyote, your own had all but closed over you."

"And will you stab us to sleep, to the sleep in Paradise?" he asked, recalling the bliss that came from a needle thrust.

Krag laughed. Always the weakness of flesh, always! Even this copper stoic, making no concession to pain, was lecherous in the memory of oblivion. Krag nodded his head. "If I choose," he said.

Perplexity clouded the Yaqui's features. Why did the hard, strange, ponderous rock of man wish to live in the desert sierra among the hunted masters of the wilderness? Like all his kind, did he hunger for a hidden mine? No, since he had found a mine already. To betray them? Perhaps. But hardly. The man was not an imbecile. The Mexican government had offered no reward. One does not offer rewards for a slice of the moon. The warrior elders would have to decide. Yet the perplexity grew threatening in the serpent eyes.

"Well, Coyote?"

Slowly the wild ferocity which was affection roused the Yaqui. "I know," he cried, his voice like the deep note of falling waters. "You are weary of your kind. You call them babes. Soft pink babes they are. Yes, *you* would weary of them. I understand. And call me Coyote, if you wish, though in the tribe I am *Tetibite*."

Krag nodded toward his rifles and pistol. They were where he had laid them the night before. "They are yours, Coyote," he said, "and many cartridges. I hear that some of your sharpest marksmen must even use the old bows and arrows."

"You almost are welcome," returned the Yaqui. "These are precious."

Krag nodded again — toward his horses. He wanted one saddled, and both made ready for the journey. He wanted the Yaqui to do it for him. There was no misunderstanding that.

Instantly the savage's rifle was levelled from his waist. "Am I then thy son?" he hissed.

"Yet you will saddle my horse, I think," said Krag.

The Yaqui's lean breast filled exultantly. His eyes fell on his weapon, and he seemed bewildered, as if unable to remember what he had meant to do with it.

"I will saddle thy horse, my father," he said, leaping to the task.

CHAPTER NINE

The Lone Oak

ONE night some two years later, while a storm tore and snapped at earth and in each lightning flash the sierra's teeth were bared at heaven, the padded foot-falls of a Yaqui runner splashed the mountain trail, in open, generous rhythm. There was no sight of him as he ran except the ghostly streak of his *serape*, which, like a wing, fluttered from his shoulder. The night was black, and the driven sheets of rain were blinding, except when the lightning crashed about him, but he tossed and caught a little wooden ball to while away the hours along the mountain's heaving breast. His stride was as free, his breathing as exultant, as when at sunset he had caught up a spoken message from the relay before him and started on his flight. His forbears in their youth had done the same, when Aztec emperors desired fish out of the Vermilion Sea.

In the wild night a dog yelped madly. Then another. Then many. They raged in low-walled yards, with currish discretion. Here was a mortal note laid on storm and darkness. The runner knew there were scattered huts. He had come to a village of his people. A drenched thing, a human arm, barred his way, outstretched against his throat. A dark, crouching object,

a cañon, an ancient mountain howitzer, lay across his trail.

"Ah, Tetibite, but do not crack thy shins," said the vidette cheerily, when he had made certain that he knew the runner. Yet concerning the runner's message, which must have been a grave one, he asked no question. Curiosity is no habit of speech in the Yaqui country. The runner passed into the village.

The huts were dark. Where perceived at all, they were a denser shadowing of the night. Not a tallow dip was alight behind the walls of plaited twigs. No ember glowed in dead ashes. But the runner halted before the dwelling of the elder-man of the village. The elder himself came from the doorless hut among the frantic dogs. Clutching his flapping blanket to him, he passed among goats and burros huddled close in his little corral, and spoke to the runner at the low rock wall.

The runner tossed his ball a final time. "Cajemi has been shot," he said.

Cajemi was the tribal chieftain.

Trees bent in a rush of wind through the defile. The elder waited until that turmoil was past.

"He is dead?" he asked.

"He is dying," said the messenger. "The *pelones*" — the word means lepers, but the Yaqui meant Mexican soldiers — "begged for peace. Cajemi went to Guaymas to hear them ——"

The old Yaqui groaned. "If Cajemi did that, then our need of another chief is heavy."

"But," said the runner, "Cajemi did not altogether trust them. He went only to their barracks. He

would not enter, and they shot him from the walls. He fell on his face, so his murderers are surely doomed. His daughter, alone with him, dragged him back. She dragged him to the adobe of a *pacífico*, and there Cajemi lies hidden."

"What is your message, Tetibite?"

A bolt splintered rocks on the shoulder of a peak above them. In the vivid flash the elder saw the courier's gleaming smile.

"The message," he said, "is Cajemi's. It is to kill. At the mines, in settlements, *haciendas*, towns, where you find a Mexican, let him have Cajemi's message. Now call another runner to carry on the signal. I am going back. Cajemi is dying."

"Who knows that he is dying?" demanded the elder. "We used to know when death was near, but that was before death had to pass the Lone Oak."

"Aye, the Lone Oak," said the runner. "I come for him."

"He is here," said the elder, "asleep, no doubt, bedded as a shell in the rock. An hour ago he returned through the storm. A child in the valley was ill."

"He will go with me."

"He will go with you, yes. He always goes. You know his *jaical?*"

The runner grunted. Surely he knew that hut best. The measured *splash-splash* of his sandals was lost at once in the tempest.

The hut of the priest-like Samaritan whom Yaquis called the Lone Oak was like the others, a hive-shaped blur in the tumultuous night. There was no door, and

the runner bent his head under the matted brush of the roof and entered. He stood for a moment in the black pocket. A man's heavy breathing filled each lull of the storm. It rasped in its cadence. Somewhat of a soul venting fettered impatience was in the sound. The intruder grinned. "He hates most," he thought, "to have taken from him what one cannot give him back, his sleep. *Hoo-ee*, my father, awake!"

The breathing ceased, or blended into a groan of unspeakable weariness. The runner laughed; but purposely, to voice his mirth. A torturer's genius inspired him. "My time," he thought, "my time! All other times *he* is master. *Hoo-ee*, my father!"

"Thou tongue of hell!" rumbled forth a great voice, "and curse thy noise! Here, find my hand. I have the matches. How now, my Vale Coyote?"

The match, of Mexican wax, flashed alight, and a hand that might have been an ogre's held it to a candle. The hand was of a huge bearded man half risen from a bunk in the back of the hut. He had thrown a sheet and bear skins from him, and as he sat on the edge of the couch his night shirt of clean white muslin fell away and revealed a massive, hairy chest. His beard was tumbled curls, virile as the Jove of Phidias, and seemed of bronze, with a dark, fugitive sheen. It hid his mouth and the lines there, whether of benevolence or cruelty. He caught up a mirror from a stool at his bedside, looked once, and laid it down, and passed a hand across his brow, heavily, as though to press out the furrows of a scowl.

Hardship and perils are of the day's work, and a good

shepherd takes no thought of his own life. But a warm bed, and a storm without, when one is heavy with sleep, when the simulacrum of death nourishes the body to take up life again, when one is snatched from that lethal tomb, then in truth a saint might scowl and be forgiven. James Krag, come like a tribal god among the Yaquis and hedged inscrutably in the mystery of godship, at such a time fought with himself his hardest fight, and the young savage in malignant glee seemed to know it.

Krag saw the flashing teeth, and his gray eyes, cleared by mountain living and mountain perils, as steady and strong and calmly fierce as the eagle's, narrowed on the lean, dripping Indian, considering him. A viper's eyes met them, unmoving, alert.

It was the old duel, yet plainly these two were glad to see each other. The duel of their wild natures was life. It was a jungle bond of affection. All that could taunt, sting, and make mad, lay in the insolence of the white man's contemplation, and the Yaqui's gaze, shifting thirstily, darted to a knife struck in the latticed wall. Krag's laugh, sneer, chuckle, grunt — all four it was — invited the Indian to strike. The naked body trembled. Krag stretched back comfortably on his bed.

"If that's all, my Vale Coyote, Nature still owes me two nights of sleep. Take the knife when you go." He turned on his side, closing his eyes.

"My father," exclaimed the Yaqui, surrendering.

"Stand off my matting," said Krag. "The water is cascading over thy ribs like many brooks. Choose a blanket, and hang thy *serape* to dry."

"There is no time. I come ——"

"Ho, do you? Then I am blind."

"Be dressing while I speak." Yet the Yaqui did not give at once his real message. There was another, one more apt to stir the imperturbable Oak. "I come not long since from the Great Stack. I went to gather cartridges and powder from the *pacíficos*. They can give little besides their wages since you are there no more."

Krag sat again on the bunk, and was lacing his boots. The Yaqui could not see his face, but at mention of the Great Stack, the fingers tightened on the strings.

"They have found your bones," said the Yaqui. "They found them in the *Barranca Quebrante*, near the trail of the new iron road where you told me to put them. The builders of the iron road found them. They were yellowed by the sun. They were clothed in your rags, and the gold band from your finger was on one finger. Our people, the *pacìficos*, heard these matters when the Gringos of the Great Stack talked."

"What more?" The voice was hard, impersonal.

"We let the builders of the iron road build until they found the bones. Then we drove the builders again across the desert back to the Great Stack. That is as you wish, so the building of the road may cost much money. We killed threescore, and the *pelones* threw away seventeen Mauser guns when they ran."

"What more?" The voice was but a shade deeper.

A tip of tongue wet the coppery lips. "Your woman ——"

Krag raised his head, looked steadily at the Yaqui. He would take this full on, in the open. "Yes?"

"She waited for you a long time, but still you do not come, and she is now in the north country with her people."

"You told me that nearly two years ago. Go on, Coyote."

"Her father, who builds the new iron road, buys that mine from her, so your woman has much money." The young Yaqui dwelt on it lingeringly. He was baffled, and his perplexity was the tribe's also. For why, leaving riches behind him, had this white man come among them, giving the utter devotion of a saint? "—— much, much money," the Yaqui repeated.

"You tell me only what is old, Coyote."

"Maybe, but I tell you also of your friend, my father, of that man of the pink skin who was so greedy for silver rocks in the *barranca*. He has departed also for the north country ——"

"Peace, Coyote, that also is stale. My friend secretly took many *pesos* from the Great Stack people, for he needed money to hold his part of the mine. And my wife, because she is rich, saved him. It is as I planned it. Go on, Coyote, to what is new."

Homeopath of the human heart, he had indeed planned it so. A potion of silver rock craftily administered, and human nature was functioning quite to his notion. Often he took the news from his courier's mouth and foretold the gist of it himself. But this time he would not mystify the Yaqui. Something stifled the prompting. He even wondered if he hoped that his forecast was at fault. "Go on, Coyote," he said patiently. "They have found my bones. Very good. White or yellow, I have no more

use for them. Therefore I am dead — and . . . *speak, thou snake,* before I touch thee!"

"And," said the Yaqui, "it comes to the ears of the Great Stack that the woman and the pink-face are married in the north country."

"So," said Krag. . . . "Now say what brings you here."

The Yaqui stood silent. He was regarding Krag's rigid, bloodless face with wolfish greed. His tale had severed the white man's bond with the white man's world, and for that the Indian was exultant. But it left the white man free, or free in the eyes of the tribe, as to other bonds, and the jealousy of the young savage was murderous. His gesture was sudden, panther-like. He snatched the knife from the wall, and held it.

"My father can now take a maiden of the tribe," he said.

That had been hinted before, and Krag had laughed. He did not laugh now. Thinking of Maisie, he did not laugh. Coyote saw violence purpling the cheek-bones, and gloated on that negative that was his answer.

"It will be urged," he murmured. "The Yaquis will not hold to my father's good faith among them if he says no. Torture and death have been kept back, but ——"

Krag rose quietly, and struck him with his open hand on the mouth.

The Yaqui's teeth flashed white, but it was a jubilant smile. "A good answer, my father," he cried, tossing and catching the knife as he did the wooden ball when he ran. "Now we will go to Cajemi. He is dying. He would hide behind the Lone Oak."

"Cajemi the chief?"

"The great chief, yes."

"To the corral, then, Coyote. Bring my horse."

Maisie married — as he had planned! A dying chief — an event for which he had waited! The legacy of tribal secrets — here lay the final advance on his goal!

CHAPTER TEN

A Miscalculation

COYOTE led, upturning his face to the beating rain, drawing taut the halter of the white man's horse. On the mountain trail, the old Yaqui Trail, he brought down his open stride to the lope of a wolf, yet at that the rider behind him used spurs and lash, while the horse sniffed for precipices in the black turmoil. Through the weird Mesquite Forest the way was hardly better, because of low-hanging limbs, and uprooted trees, and the eddying pools and quicksands of new-born torrents. Daybreak but made it drearier. Before they came to the open, they stopped and waited for night. The storm had ceased, and a soft west wind bore a tang of salt from the Californian gulf. Coyote said that they were now near the coast and three leagues from Guaymas. He predicted trouble, for the *pelones*, if they had not found Cajemi, would be scouring town and country.

With nightfall they started again, leaving Krag's horse staked in a deep arroyo bed. Once, for an hour, they had to lie flat on the plain, while two mounted *rondas* smoked cigarettes under the stars and talked and waited to report to their officer on his round. Another time, lacking shadows of cactus clumps and bowlders,

they wormed their way across a starlit space. Or Coyote, poised with nostrils twitching, as if sound were a thing of scent, heard a distant challenge and the impact of hoofs, while the white man heard neither.

At last they came upon the crest of a barren cliff, and looked down on the roofs of a town, and beyond, on the shimmering waters of a placid bay. They descended by a twisting, beaten path, which opened on a lane flanked by squalid adobes. They were in this lane, hugging the shadows, when a startled, "Halt! Who goes?" broke on them, which was instantly followed by a pistol shot behind them.

Krag felt the Yaqui's fingers on his arm, and they sped silently, close along the adobe walls. One corner they turned, and a moment later swung short into utter darkness. To Krag it seemed as if a black cavern had engulfed them. It was only a charcoal vender's adobe, whose sooty hole in the wall opened on the street. They tested their steps cautiously, the Yaqui guiding. Once the toe of Krag's boot caught on a soft bulk, and the thing roused with a querulous grunt. But it lay back again, and all was still as before. A blanketed family lay scattered on the floor asleep. Ahead there was an arched door-way, and starlight flooded the *patio* beyond, where the charcoal merchant kept his burros. One little beast was stretched prone, and Krag suspected, from the twisted neck, that it was dead.

Instead of leading out upon the *patio*, Coyote sheered off toward the side wall, where the hovel was darkest; where, also, as they discovered by groping, sacks of charcoal were banked to the ceiling. The Yaqui stopped

and felt along the bottom tier, passing a hand over the end of each bag. Krag heard him tugging at something; then a bag was wrenched free and dragged out, and then a second. Two more bags above the first two came out more easily. "Follow," whispered the Yaqui, and on hands and knees they crawled into a tunnel through the charcoal. Behind them some one pushed the bags back into place. The dust filled Krag's nostrils, dried his throat, and hurt his eyes, although he tied a handkerchief over his face. They came to the wall itself, at a point where the adobe bricks were loose, and Coyote shoved them outward. Coyote, and behind him Krag, squeezed through the hole, and beyond it stood erect, again in total darkness.

"The Lone Oak." It was Coyote's voice. Krag thought of liveried footmen announcing a titled guest. The silence held, and Coyote spoke the words again, intoning them oddly.

Nothing of dread import happened. The plaint of a guitar, invisible strings brushed by invisible fingers, the final chord of an interrupted song — that was all. Murmuring of breeze-swept, ripening grain would not be softer.

"Hunh, thy Lone Oak!" The voice was a woman's, as rich and thick as clotted cream, gurgling from the throat. "*Hunh*, it is time! Thou, Tetibite, first put back the adobes in the wall."

"Call me a fool," retorted Coyote. "They are back."

A match was scratched across its box, and glowing fingers, a rounded arm, and a woman's head and bust flashed with vivid warmth out of darkness. Her skin

was bright copper, tinged by rose beneath. The eyes were black, black and sleepy and lustrous. They blinked in the yellow light, like smouldering coals of jet. The glossy hair flowed free and straight. The breast was full, and the dark red lips also, and her even teeth were white as chalk. One thought of her teeth as keen and sharp. She was a sleek and lithesome animal, and bounteously dangerous. Krag grunted in his beard.

She was sitting on a Yaqui matting of reeds, and as she lighted a tallow dip near at hand, Krag saw a bow and feathered arrows beside her. The guitar, at her other side, was an armadillo shell mounted in cedar. Her white skirt, slashed with scarlet, was of maguey fibre and of her own weaving. A sleeveless blouse of white *manta* covered her body. Large pearls from the Gulf of California, grooved and so threaded on the strand, were a barbaric ornament that heightened the sheen of tawny flesh. Her feet were bare. At most she was not eighteen, but her being throbbed with a cruel greed of fulfillment.

"It is days even," she complained in her rich, cloying tones, "that I roll his tobacco in corn husks." She waved an arm to a shrivelled form lying near her. "And he has not the breath to keep them lighted. But this great Oak of a Man? I want to see him."

She rose with the candle, so that Krag saw better and understood where he was. They were in a side room of the charcoal dealer's hovel. It was a long room, from front to back the length of the charcoal dealer's store. It was, moreover, exceedingly narrow; a tall man might not lie across it. The place was a gloomy, sinister

vault. The floor was the ground. The high walls were dried mud. There was not a door, not a window, not a crack. There were steps against the back wall to the roof, but the tiling of the roof showed no break. Neither rat nor bat could have escaped an enemy in this cell. The room was like the false bottom of a trunk turned on its side. From without the room's existence was not to be suspected, nor even proved, unless by actual measurement of the walls.

The vault was, in effect, the false bottom of a trunk, for its purposes were secret. Crude, dingy apparatus, mortars and pestles, old coffee mills, scales and measures, littered the ground. A work bench, covered with sheet iron, was strewn with a black powder resembling ground charcoal. Some had been scraped into a heap at one end. There were charcoal sacks, filled and empty; there were manilla bags, and a yellow stuff spilling out; and there were boxes of a something white and lumpy. In the centre of the room there was an open well, with a bucket and rope. Nothing lacked for a primitive manufacture of gunpowder, and the charcoal vendor was engaged in just that, bringing charcoal from his kilns in the mountains, getting sulphur and saltpetre from ships in the bay, and smuggling forth the product in his supposedly empty charcoal sacks. He was a Yaqui *pacífico*, this charcoal merchant, and his tribal brethren of the sierra required gunpowder.

The candle's wavering circle of light passed over the shrivelled form, where it lay bedded on sacking and blankets. A hideous old face stared upward, and flabby cheeks puffed out as the thing sucked at a husk cigarette

hanging from its lower lip. This was the thing that had drawn Krag out of the mountains. The surgeon was taking off his coat, when the girl raised the candle to his face.

"*Hunh*, the Oak!" she mused aloud, peering into the eyes under his thick brows. A gnarled monarch, or monstrosity, of the forest, she might have said. Storms of passion could not bend him, nor yet the clinging parasite, remorse. The girl's sleepy eyes blinked impudently. "But what I see of him for the beard is black with charcoal. Tetibite, there's water in the bucket. Bring the water, for I must see this man."

Coyote's fingers coiled about her arm. "Quick! You get the water," he said. "My father must cleanse his hands before he works in blood. "What"— he was helping Krag off with his coat, and brought his hand away, wet — "ay, and here is blood already!"

Krag glanced at him sharply. "No matter, Coyote," he said. He knelt over his coat, and began laying out a small instrument case, packages, and vials from the pockets. He worked with despatch in these preparations. He was not deceived by the lazy calm of the face on the blankets. "Now the water, and hasten, before the great chief yonder departs in a puff of his own smoke."

"The *pelon* who shot at us in the street," Coyote insisted; "you were hit, my father!"

"Where?" cried the girl. She brought water and an earthern basin. "In his shoulder? No, there, in his side. Oo-oo, we must cut away his shirt!"

Krag was rolling up his sleeves, baring his wide, hard forearms. Unheeding the two young Yaquis, he laved his hands, but not his face. Then, nodding to Coyote

to bring the candle, he gathered up his instruments and went to the old man. The girl followed. She stood by, her arms folded, stroking her arms with her finger tips.

It might, in the ghastly light, have been a worthless peon huddled in his rags and vermin to die. But there were neither rags nor vermin. There was the inevitable loin cloth, that only. His clothes were a heap on the floor, and these carried a chief's distinction. There was his *charro* jacket, heavy with silver and recently heavy with his blood; his skin-tight, silver-laced leather breeches; his gold-roped sombrero; and his small, high-heeled shoes with great, glittering spurs. The *manta* shirt had been ripped into bandages.

However withered and repulsive, the hide of him was clean, for he was a full-blood Yaqui. Whipcord sinews beneath, as well as bones, stretched the unsightly parchment, and betokened the endurance of bull thongs in emaciation. In the features the quality of hideousness mostly lay. They were loose and flaccid, pierced by a wiry, corkscrew hair here and there on the chin and jaw. The copperish drab of the skin was mottled over by a leprous pink. The eyes were only his nose's breadth apart, and were seemingly crowded against that thick ridge by the high, bulbous cheek-bones. Because of their sparse lashes and the scraggy brows shading the lids, the effect of them was that, when he looked down his nose, he seemed staring wide ahead; and when he opened them, each was like a weasel crouching deep in its hole. They were the instinct of the hunted, not alone of one old man hunted through his long life, but of a tribe, hunted from generation to generation. His mouth was enormous,

entrenched in shrivelled lines curving from nostril to chin, where the loose flesh lapped over. The upper lip lay tight against the gums, but the under hung, as if cut away, and between them the length of grin was spaced by three yellow fangs. A greenish smear, war's pathetic panoply, had been rubbed on his chin and arms. A bandage crossed his chest, under one arm and over the opposite shoulder, and at one sickening spot it was kept freshly wet by a crimson spring beneath.

He did not raise his eyes when Krag knelt by him. "The candle," he was muttering. "This husk — this *cigarrito* ——"

"Coyote," said Krag, "sit there and tend his cigarette. The great chief," he said, but gently, with no shade of irony, "must have time for other troubles. When that one burns his teeth, have another ready."

"Truly, here is the Yaqui's good friend," wheezed the old man. On a rising inflection his hollow voice collapsed entirely. "Dolores there, a dog even would she drag to shelter from Mexican bullets. Ay, and I can thank the Mexicans that she did as much for her father. But she touches no broom to sweep back death from his pallet. Not one *barrido* has she given, O Heaven! And she does not hold steady the candle to my *cigarrito*. Yet, mind you, Lone Oak "— the weasels were peering from their holes — "mind you now, since a tigress a man will have, a superb one should he have, and — but look once at Dolores."

"If that's your name, Dolores," said Krag, "fill the bucket again."

The old man tried to raise his head. "She — she

obeys!" he murmured in grim astonishment. He studied the Yaquis' good friend through half-closed lids. Nor was it the surgeon's work that interested him. Cajemi the chief knew that he was dying. Each breath from the depth of his lungs brought up a new moistening, as a broken pipe wets the sod above. Krag dared not probe for the bullet. But Cajemi was not thinking of that. His interest was the face of the white man, of a young white man, bearded and blackened. Cajemi cast the smoke sideways from his mouth, that he might always see the face. He was thinking of this: he must leave many Mexicans behind; yes, although his life had been a busy one. His people, so their legends said, once had numbered thrice a hundred thousand, but that was before the centuries of fighting for their valley and sierra. Cajemi himself had led barely a thousand warriors, and against his thousand they had sent twenty thousand. Yet, to bring him down at last, they had offered a treacherous peace. But one thing could follow, the death struggle of the tribe. And the tribe's monument should be a great heap of Mexicans slain. The thousand warriors must not be unduly wasted. There was need in this of more than a poor Indian's craft. A rugged saint had come among them, whom they called the Lone Oak, and he had often whispered good counsel, so that a rumour stole into Mexican garrisons of an American officer whose far-discerning eye guided the Yaqui strategy, making it certain and deadly, unerring in ambush, elusive in flight, fathoms deep in hiding. The superstition thrived and decided skirmishes.

Cajemi's eyes opened. "The Lone Oak — I heard

these children saying — you were hit by the shot we heard."

Krag's mouth twitched unseen. "No matter," he said, and went on dressing the old man's wound.

"He has said it twice — no matter," Coyote grumbled. The young Yaqui was restive. His viper eyes were darting from the chief to Krag, from Krag to the girl stroking her arms. "It is not the first *pelon* bullet my father carries for us."

"The candle again, Tetibite." Cajemi opened his mouth, letting the smoke drift out. When the cloud passed, his eyes opened again on Krag. "Why for us?" His voice was like the rasp of a saw. "Why these things for us? Why?"

Krag's forefinger pressed out a sudden scowl, as though wiping off perspiration. "Why?" he said wearily. "My love of wolves, Cajemi, is enduring. That is why."

The old Yaqui spat out his cigarette. "Why?" he cried. He knew he was growing weaker. "The true answer, why?"

"Why then," Krag burst forth, but his anger was daring calculation, "I do not know. Why, truly, do I come to you, and not sleep in my bed? I do not know. You are no wolf. You break the oath of the tribe, the splendid Yaqui oath, which is never to stop fighting. Why do I come to a dog? I do not know."

Coyote's chin jerked high, the white teeth showing. The girl sucked in her breath. Her sensuous fingers lowered, until their tips touched the white man's head. She and Coyote were with him. But Krag's calculating

went farther. He waited, as a chemist watches for an unknown reaction.

"A dog?" Cajemi laid a hand on his wound, bathing it in the life fluid flowing for the tribe. "Ay, I am a dog. The Lone Oak always said: 'Never go to a *pelon* for peace talk!' An oak sends its roots far in what is hidden. And this wisdom must take my place. . . . Lone Oak"— his voice rose, edged and querulous — "be a Yaqui first, then great chief. — A Yaqui? — Thou art a Yaqui when Yaquis trust thee. Take a maiden of the tribe. So may we know thou art a tribesman. Then the secrets of the tribe are thine. The secrets — they go from me with the last drop from my veins to the great chief after me. Secrets of mountain and gorge, of rock and sand, of caves, of hidden mines . . . Look, white man, there is Dolores. *Take her!*"

Krag renewed the gauze on the wound. "So," he said. Coyote from where he sat looked up at the girl and mocked her in silent laughter.

The chief gazed a moment longer. Then his head rolled on his pallet. "Tetibite," he said, "we must kill this white man."

Krag smiled. Coyote, true Yaqui, was ready to obey. Dolores, a scorned woman, was more than ready. Yet Krag's mirth was real. He alone smelt the ruse to compel him.

The dying chief, although Krag read him so well, was already mouthing the fancy for one more victim before he went, but something, an alarm prearranged, put their thoughts to rout. The world without was tapping on their vault. Cautiously deadened blows fell on the wall.

Coyote snuffed the candle. A faint gray haze formed overhead; it was day sifting through the fluted tiles of the roof. The girl snatched her bow and arrows, and hurried up the steps against the back wall. One could break through the tiling and escape over the roofs. The steps were provided for that. But Dolores, and Coyote close behind her, pulled out an adobe brick from the top of the wall, and looked through the slit they had made. Coyote motioned to Krag, and he climbed up beside them. Outside they saw a man, a Mexican officer with drawn pistol, standing on the *patio* wall. He was frowning perplexedly down at the burros.

"See," whispered Coyote, "the *pelon* who shot at us last night. With daybreak he has followed the blood drippings."

In effect this was true. The Mexican officer had noticed spattered drops on the pavement, and he had traced the drops to the charcoal vendor's, to lose them there in the trampled coal dust. But he hoped to pry out the fugitives yet, and entirely by himself. He had a pert, ambitious air, and was resolved on an elusive glory. Search of the charcoal store had revealed nothing. The fugitives must have fled by way of the *patio*.

Coyote and the girl were fighting, silently, viciously. He had snatched at the bow. She had brought her nails through his cheek.

"Let me!"

"No, no, he is mine!"

The Mexican on the wall turned slowly. His puzzled gaze was travelling toward their loophole. Coyote uttered a cry of joy. "Quick!" he hissed. "You must,

Dolores; he is my own! — Listen, I have felt his chains, his sword, his *foot*. Ask ——" They turned appealing, flaming faces to Krag.

Krag nodded. He, too, had recognized Coyote's captor, the sub-lieutenant of that day in the gorge. Reluctantly Dolores surrendered the bow. "But the next shot ——" she insisted.

Coyote fitted an arrow, pulled the feathered butt to his eye, and the twang of the release interrupted her. "Pig!" she snapped vengefully.

Krag looked away, but to cover that weak gesture he said, "Somebody has killed cock robin."

The body fell into the *patio*. Two blackened, leather-aproned men ran out and dragged it into the charcoal dealer's. When Dolores had seen quite the last of that, she flung herself from the steps in a tantrum and went to her father.

Krag took Coyote by the shoulder. The grip seemed to crunch his bones, but the young Yaqui knew it for a caress. "Boy!" whispered Krag; "would you like to be chief?"

The warrior answered simply. "I often see how Cajemi might kill more *pelones* — yes."

"Then do a thing to make talk."

"My father will tell me what thing?"

Krag pointed through the loophole toward the edge of the town. "That higher building, with the towers?"

"The barracks, of the soldiers."

"You can come near it over the house tops?"

"Surely. It is in the next square."

"Good, Coyote, and the thing will look brave. You

will carry the dead Mexican over the roofs; then lash him to that flag-staff on the last roof yonder, and bid his friends in the barracks come for him. Chief Tetibite's defiance, we will call the little play. They will shoot. You can escape?"

The Yaqui laughed easily. A friendly *patio*, a drop from sight; yes, he could escape.

"The burro drivers, the charcoal man," Krag went on, "they must see the thing, that they may tell of it in the sierra before the tribe chooses the next chief. Wait, there's a dead burro below. You will wrap your friend in the burro's skin."

Admiring wonder blended with glee on the Indian's face. "Ay, will I?" he breathed. "But Cajemi is right. My father must be chief."

"And Dolores?"

The savage face darkened. "No," he said. "Chief Tetibite it shall be."

He was for going at once to the adventure, but Krag stayed him and called Dolores. She came sullenly, and Coyote jeered. "Is it a bad tooth, Dolores?"

"Pig!" she cried, flaring. "When it was my chance to send a *pelon* ahead of my father ——"

"Peace," said Krag. "You have more arrows!"

"*Hunh*, to waste on an Oak, maybe."

"No, for Coyote will provide the targets. Go with him over the house tops. Hide behind the farthest parapet, and when the soldiers come to the barracks windows at Coyote's call, amuse yourself. Pick off what forerunner for your father you wish. Perhaps a colonel, a general ——"

Her breast rose. "Tetibite, does he speak true?"

Coyote took her by the hand. "Only come, little sister. Come out to play."

Like famished cubs crawling out of their den, they went, and Krag was alone with the dying chief. After replacing the adobes in the wall, he lighted the candle and sat himself on the ground beside his patient. He heard a plaintive rattling in the old man's throat.

"Here," said Krag, "here is one," and he put a cigarette between the champing lips. From time to time also he plied him with the wizardry of his science to stem an ebbing vitality.

"Dolores," whispered the old man — "where?"

"She has gone. She will be back with news to please you."

"Tetibite?"

"He is with her."

"And you?" The restless eyes steadied in their depths. "White man, what do you want?"

Krag passed a hand over his brow, in what seemed a habit only, and bending forward, he quietly met that scrutiny of a hunted tribe. "Cajemi," he said, "might rightly ask that had I taken the chance to be chief after him. And then the true answer might be: 'I want those secrets of hidden mines.' But I refused ——"

"White man," came the edged voice, "what do you want?"

"Cajemi," Krag answered him patiently, "I am an outcast. What, then? What, if I seek outcasts? What, if I give to them my life? What, Cajemi, what? The answer is in the question. Ask me no more."

The old eyes wavered. Something child-like, trusting, came into them. "You were — shot — last night — on your way to help me."

"That is nothing. — Ho, Cajemi, *Cajemi*, you must not sleep! Open your eyes! You ——"

"I am going, *señor* It is — the start. But hold me until — the secrets —— "

"I am listening, Cajemi."

"Promise, you will tell them — to the chief after me — and forget. First the — richest, the *Veta Negra*. In a *barranca*, the face of the *Barranca* ——"

"Yes, Cajemi, yes?" Krag's voice was low, and of wondrous patience.

"It is called" — the withered eyelids fluttered open, as the fluttering soul within hovered over the name. Suddenly his gaze was held, and it struggled pitifully, like a bird on a limed twig. "*Thine eyes!*" he screeched. "They are hungry — *hungry* — thine eyes!" The cry fell to senile, crafty mirth, spluttering through a foam on his lips.

A shot, then scattering shots and crazed yells burst on the outside world. Two Yaqui children were baiting *pelones*. Cajemi strained to rise. Blood filled his mouth, and he lay back, listening. "Dolores!" His eyes closed, and the foam lathered his hideous grin. "Ay," he murmured, his mocking spirit calling back as it went, "ay, I remember, Dolores. Thou hast the secrets — coaxed them from me, wench. But Dolores, look into the white man's eyes. Look ——"

"Faugh!" Krag threw a sack over the face, and let him die.

Krag got to his feet. He drew back one foot, to drive his heavy boot against the corpse. But a spasm crossed his brow, and his jaws met. He held himself from the ghastly act.

The muscles of his body relaxed, and the pent-up flood of his being receded. A cold, dead smile parted his lips. He seemed to be taking stock. His wife and baby girl, they were on that side. They were gone, paid out, cancelled. The bleak loneliness of life, that also he was paying. Two years of it he had paid already. They were two years of dreary toil in — what? In human pity. No inner thought of self was given outward expression. During two years every breath he drew was given to his fellow man, to the poor hunted Indian, to the fellow creature who needed him most. Over on that side were those things. On this side, what? Futility! Colossal futility! The dead Yaqui at his feet had just paid him off.

He took from his pocket a small mirror, and looked in it intently, this bankrupt. His face was blackened, as he had purposely left it, the better to blur expression. The tumbled beard hid his mouth, and the lines of his mouth. There was nothing significant to behold, nothing to betray him, nothing, except the eyes and his fellow man's intuition. He looked long and thoughtfully into the eyes. He saw as the dead Yaqui saw. A man may not hide the blackness within. He pondered this truth. Two years had made it known to him. Ah — the eyes were suddenly glittering — here was one asset at least out of the rubbish! He credited the two lost years with the elimination of a vital error. He had miscalculated.

"The Lord Christ himself," he muttered, "would have failed by only *doing*. One must *be* the thing!"

Still he thought long, and as he thought, his expression changed. It hardened to granite with resolve. At last he let the mirror fall, and quietly ground it under his heel. "I *will!*" he said aloud. "I will *be* the thing!"

He picked up his coat and turned out one of the pockets. Bits of glass fell to the floor. They had been a flask, and the flask had been filled with a potent cordial. But a bullet, doing no other harm, had broken the flask and wet the man as with his own blood. "That," he reflected, "was not *being* the thing."

Then he knelt, and lifted the sack, and closed the dead man's eyes.

He discovered that this act was setting his foot in the path of most resistance. For the act itself he loathed himself, but he gloried in the new foe that he had encountered. He wondered at the terrible and diabolic strength of this new foe that was himself. He wet his lips thirstily for the struggle to come.

PART III

THE TREASURE

CHAPTER ONE

The New Strategy

RIFLES, bullets, bows and arrows, and an industrious torch, if not hampered by a peevish civilization—these can have a rich effectiveness in murder. Also they have a downright frankness, a clean quality of horror, mightily invigorating after crimes of the slums, and the cynical subtleties of crime on the other crust. Perhaps it is a matter of atmosphere. A man might conceivably prefer being tomahawked on a clear frosty night to certain adventures in a foul cellar. It is certain, at least, that Krag loved his Yaquis.

The new state of these coppery children was a freehold of hell. It had been bad enough before, under truculent old Cajemi. And Cajemi, by letting himself be trapped and slain, was in his grave making it so much worse now. Because of that treachery the old, dull pain leaped to jumping agony. The tribe bit and tore, with a madman's horrid frenzy.

An expression of this, the very keynote of it, was a foeman's corpse wrapped in an ass's skin and flaunted under the walls of the enemy's citadel. Such a reckless and classic deed made articulate the tribe's rage, and the tribe spoke gratefully. It named Coyote chief.

Because of the rainy season when Cajemi died, the

Mexicans kept close in barracks, so that in the first raids the Yaquis worked their murderous will unchecked. But they roused a formidable adversary. The Mexican general of that zone sent his president in the capital thousands of soldier caps, demanding that the caps be returned with soldiers under them. The president sent back the caps, and the soldiers were under them. Likewise the president sent picks and shovels to widen the old Yaqui Trail into a military road. Cajemi had foretold the death struggle of the tribe.

But the *broncos*, the hot-bloods of the tribe, thought only that there would be more *pelones*. They were used to more *pelones*, and their hospitality was perennial. The call went forth for the gathering of the tribe. It was a low-spoken word. In effect it was the great gong clanging on the *teocalli* of the Aztec war god. Runners stole into mining camps, *haciendas*, towns, wherever a Yaqui labourer dwelt in civilization, and whispered the word. Even the *pacíficos* melted by scores into the wilderness, answering instinct as well as the chief's call. They sensed the perishing of their race.

The warriors left their fields and villages in the Valley — the Yaqui Valley of homes and flocks — and drew back into mountain passes and pathless forests. They planted corn on hillsides or in little clearings deep in the wood, and these the women tended when the men were gone. They sold off their flocks of sheep and goats, buying ammunition. The children smuggled grain from the towns or fish from the coast and river, and practised marksmanship on wild turkey, deer, and bear. Arsenals in secret caverns were paid out, and the Yaqui

who could have no fire-arm made himself a bow and arrows, or a spear.

Tetibite made his chief's house in that wild mountain village of straggling huts where Krag lived. Chihuitl was the name of the village. The word itself was a memory of Aztec kinsmen long since conquered, and of a far-off time when Yaquis dwelt in Anahuac near to the heart of Montezuma. Only by a hidden and perilous trail threading up a deep *barranca* might one come among the nested huts. But no human being, unless he were a Yaqui or the Yaquis' friend or a doomed prisoner, ever came that far. The lost pocket mid black peaks seemed a region of foreboding, as though one were under the shadow of frowning giants and had left hope behind in the valley, where the sun swept her domain broadly. Yet the sun, when zenith high, pierced the cavernous nook, and there were ferns in the crannies of wondrously tinted granite and wild flowers on the ledges to tell that she did.

When the rains ceased, the tribe held a *fiesta* at Chihuitl, around the chief's house. But the feast was not mere gorging over the oil pots. It foreshadowed darker things. Feast they did, for that matter, grouped by families and friends about caldrons in the open air, spearing out bits of wild duck or venison, while patient beldams warmed *tortillas* on the coals, and dogs snatched at bones in unwary fingers. The eating done, sleek youngsters played at games of running, or shot at marks. Harps and guitars mingled their notes, and a low, wild, poignant cry throbbed in them that was very like a *czardas* of Tzigany, and there was dancing on a levelled place, and fires kindled in dark eyes. The young men decked their

black hair with quills, and bared their breasts and arms, and swung into a rhythmic step, around and round, swaying, twisting, hopping, and moaning lugubriously to the weird plaint of the music. Before the chief's house old men squatted in council, nodding or scowling at the murder-laden word and gesture of their young chief.

Behind this council of old men, in the swept door-way of Coyote's hut, Krag sat on a bale of fagots. He scraped an arrow on his knee with a bit of glass. Now and again, when a voice leaped angrily like a forked flame, he glanced up at the solemn pow-pow. He was indulgent, as of children, and these children, he knew, were game for their play at death. One may sit and watch the sea for hours, and each breaker rolling in has its own grandeur, and each time the spectator holds his breath anew as the wave hurls itself into spray against the eternal rocks. Futility — but grandeur nevertheless. So Krag sat and watched his Yaquis, watched a sea of passion. For the sea's vastness there were centuries of hatred. Back to the horizon of time there was hatred. And for a present storm lashing the waters, there was the treachery of Cajemi's death. The desolate white man never wearied of that fathomless turbulence. There was a something in it akin to his own ebb and flow of life, for neither a man nor a people may beat against all mankind and not be broken, and he loved the sea about him because it tossed and broke and persevered again as he was tossed and broken and yet persevered.

There was a woman at the council circle, but, like Krag, not of it. Krag regarded her as a spiteful tomboy, intruding on men-children's own pow-wow. The old men

had grunted their disgust, yet let her stay. A Yaqui woman is a warrior's mate, not a squaw and beast of burden. This woman, besides, was Cajemi's daughter, and she should hear, if she must, how the tribe avenged its chiefs. But Dolores, sitting on the grass with her bare feet tucked under her, lazily fingered her guitar and crooned to herself. Sometimes she lifted her heavy, lustrous eyes and gazed up sleepily at Krag, quite frankly, quite insolently. She half smiled as if to herself, before she looked down again. Coyote saw well enough what she was doing, or trying to do, but Krag went on fashioning his arrow and was unconcerned.

The old men, clothed in white *manta* or torn and bruised leather, sitting cross-legged on their *serapes*, more like meek peons than red Indians, were debating a matter of strategy. They debated it, although they were all agreed on it already. Tetibite himself had brought word that, with the clearing of the skies, gangs of labourers were again at work laying iron rails from the Great Stack across the desert to the *Barranca Quebrante.* A train load of peons had made camp on the sand at the end of the track, and soldiers with carbines guarded them. Soon the iron road would reach to the *Americano's* mine. The mine was the mine which the Lone Oak had found before he came to the Yaquis. The *Americano* was the father of the Lone Oak's wife. It was the *Americano,* from his home in the North, who was building the new iron road. And when the first cars came to the mine, Mexican soldiers would be in the cars. Without the pain and danger of the desert march, the soldiers would be ready for battle. Hence-

forth the enemy would begin where usually he ended, at the very threshold of the Yaqui sierra.

To this strain the old men harangued: their young chief should swoop down upon the desert camp of railroad builders and again tear up the iron track. The matter was going to a vote, when Krag broke the arrow across his knee, kicked back the bale of fagots, and stood on his feet.

"Let the *Americano* build his railroad," he told them sternly.

The old men stirred as if a lash had cracked over their shoulders. The effect of the white man's cool dominance was of overriding them like foolish children. They writhed in anger, and at once felt the more humiliation because of their anger. Dolores's fingers faltered over her guitar, and she drew the striped *rebosa* closer around her breast. One is chilled to hear a man speak on the quiet air words that invite the Yaqui manner of death-giving. She bent over the guitar again, waiting. She did not know if she wished them to do it, nor if she would try to stop them. Yet there was something voluptuous in anticipation.

The sachems questioned one another with their eyes. Dignity forbade the accents of wrath. The unspoken death sentence went round the circle. They turned to the young chief in mild solemnity.

Coyote had abated nothing of his haughty apathy, and yet he was profoundly astounded at Krag's risking his life for one whom he hated, as Coyote knew he hated his wife's father. Coyote knew Krag's greed hitherto always to harass the building of the

new road, and thereby ruin that man whom he hated. The Yaqui searched the white man's countenance for the meaning of his sudden and perilous change. He saw the hard features in repose, yet still black from receding passion. There had been a cruel conflict there, of will over hatred, and the will was rock. Nothing could have been more abhorrent to Krag than what he had just asked. But he had asked it. Why? In a flash of revelation Coyote thought he knew why.

"If," said the young chief to the waiting council, "the Lone Oak would betray the tribe for the sake of the *Americano's* road, I —— but wait. Let him speak."

Krag did not speak. He had the air of regarding the matter as settled; as though, since he had bidden them do a thing, they would do it. Nothing could be more belittling to an Indian's self-esteem. After his bitterly forced word for the man Hacklette, he was in a sullen humour to hurt others. None could do it more pitilessly than he in his pitying contempt. The whim being genuine, he did not hide it. He no more hid any mood that was genuinely himself.

Such was no longer his method. It was not his method since he had closed old Cajemi's eyes. If he was ever to be believed, if ever trusted — and have the guerdon of trust — he must speak to men nakedly. Even to these children of the wilderness he must speak from *himself*, and his words, looks, acts, had to *be* himself, and not a cloak. For no fabric was heavy enough, although woven of hardship, perils, and seeming devotion, to hide the twisting of the soul beneath its folds. This was a truth that he had learned very thoroughly. After two years

of patient weaving, he had cast the cloak from him over the dead chief's clay.

Thus had he changed his method. In cold calculation he had changed it. And by it he abided, unflinching. If evil thoughts came, he let them darken his brow. For what evil there was in him, he was ready to take the consequences. The Yaquis should trust him in this at least, that he was not to be trusted. Such was enough for a beginning.

He had even shaved his beard, and his squared, gaunt, harshly aggressive features emerged, so that the Yaquis, magnificent wolves that they were, winced to look on him, quite as gentle Maisie had done. Yet he held to his new strategy, though they destroyed him. He no longer pressed out the furrows of a scowl, but let the scowl come, if it would. He passed his hand over his soul instead. For that was his strategy, too; and the essence of it. They saw a blackened soul now, like girders warped in an inferno of heat. But some day they should see it cleansed and upright; and they would trust him wholly. They would remember their years of gratitude, for the gratitude should become affection, and as naturally as a child bares a treasured hurt finger to its mother's gaze, they would bring him the secrets of the tribe.

Almost as hardily found as the Holy Grail, and by purity likewise, would be those secrets of the Yaquis. The Spaniards, the Mexicans, and the Americans had made it clear that the secrets were the tribe's life. To part with them was to perish. They were pregnant with fabulous wealth; but no Yaqui chief, naked, hungry, lacking even gunpowder, would lay a pick to the treasure, lest he reveal

it and white men flood his sierra, paying armies from the bonanza hoards. So the secrets were a primal instinct of existence itself, and the stranger who won them must lift mountainous centuries of oppression. He must lift a distrust of the weight of ancestral slain. This Krag had set himself to do.

His reward of sainthood once harvested, then might he return to evil, as the lean jackal gorges after fasting. For evil was the motive of his sainthood. Let him but possess the true *Veta Negra*, overcoming money's handicap of man over man, and out in a world of rapine he would justify his right to live. He would prove it on the man who first goaded him with wealth's disdainful sneer at simple manhood, and crush that man utterly.

Krag had brooded for years on a very few things only, and that is dangerous; on his boyhood, among others. The man lacks woefully, and is less a man, who is not startled at times into revering his boyhood as a thing apart from himself, and somehow better. He recalls an awkward being mostly hands and feet and heart, whose wondrous purity vaguely troubles his later worldly poise. Krag's story had begun in that way, promising as sweet a story as happens; as precious as the enthusiasms of youth and youth's eager courage. Furthermore the grown man will hate, if he hates meanness, the creature or circumstance that first bruised the boy's trust and opened his eyes on men and made even of him a man. Krag's danger was that he had brooded. The sap that might have been human kindness left him, and he turned to stone. He charged Hacklette with his lost boyhood. And it was Hacklette again, not the bitterness in his

own soul, whom he charged with a lost wife. Hacklette always, who kept him from perfect union with the one being he loved, and therefore with the world, and left him half a man, miserably doomed to live half a life.

And yet, facing torture, he stood between Hacklette's property and Indian destroyers. The reason was diabolic in its simplicity. He was merely playing his system, as he inwardly and sardonically described it. The new strategy did not admit of vengeful thoughts. For an hour's tedious length he could forget Hacklette, and when Hacklette stalked forth unbidden, Krag thrust him back, turning grimly to thoughts and deeds that were good. Though it killed him, he cultivated a saintly habit of the soul.

Krag's indifference to the call to speak incensed the Yaqui elders. One lifted his arm, opened his mouth to summon the nearest dancing warriors. The guitar was silenced, and Dolores looked at Coyote. The young chief was on his feet.

"No," he cried, lithe and ready. "*I* will speak."

An elder grumbled, but all were grave and anxious. It seemed that their young chief was on trial as well. Dolores crooned low over her guitar.

"I do not speak for the Lone Oak," said Coyote in a hushed voice, as when falling water is heard from a long way. "The acts of the Lone Oak have been good friends to our people. Yet, is *he* our good friend? We cannot know. I do not speak for him."

He paused, forgetting the earnestness of words meant alone for the welfare of his tribe. His eyes had met Krag's, and in them came the old gleam, chafing against

his savage's affection for the man. Something had always stayed his hand before, even while it goaded him to strike. But this time he held no knife. The knife was in other hands. He had only to stand aside. Yet he turned, so as to keep the white man's maddening sneer from his sight.

"I speak," he said, "for one who did what was good because it was good. I, Tetibite, saved to be your chief, was caught in hiding, where I had crawled like a wounded snake on my belly to die, and was dragged in my blood, and kicked, and prodded as an ox with bayonet points, when this one saw and hurried a man to my enemies and made them stop, and they brought me to her. She spread blankets where they laid me. She put water to my lips, and when the Lone Oak rose out of the earth she helped him with trembling hands and pitying eyes while he bathed my wound. That was good, because *she* was good. She asked nothing. There was naught to ask, to hope for, from a dying wild animal. But the animal who was dying, Tetibite the chief, stands here now to give her his life, unless you let him give her something of better use, which is bread to her mouth and the warmth of wood fires in the cold country where she dwells."

He contemplated them proudly for a space, and they noted that his rifle lay on the ground at his feet.

"The Lone Oak," he went on, "is a man. He does not save himself behind a woman. You will wait, then, a long time for him to speak. He must have heard, as I heard men say at the Great Stack, that the woman's father pours all his money into the railroad building, and he takes at last from the woman the money that the

Lone Oak left her for bread and wood, for her and her little child" — Coyote could not see the darkening of the face behind him, and the astonishment on it — "so," he said, "that the man may build his railroad, and come to his mine of silver, and pay back to the woman what he has taken, for this, and not to betray, does the Lone Oak say to us: 'Leave the man's railroad in peace.' . . . And now Tetibite, chief of the tribe, which is great chief, says this also: 'Leave the man's road in peace!'"

Dolores struck her guitar sharply, and the notes burst in riotous accord with the music of the dancers, and her voice rose, rich and cloying and madly defiant, on the wild strain.

The old men frowned. Coyote snatched the guitar from her.

"Fools," she laughed. "You listen to Tetibite? . . . *Hunh*, so there is a woman! . . . And the Lone Oak. . . . Pig, give back my guitar!"

"Take her away," said the elder of the village wearily.

"And you will not!" She showed her teeth. "You will listen to Cajemi's daughter, for Cajemi's daughter has much to tell. That iron road, when it comes into the *barranca* ——"

"True," Krag interposed quietly, "the railroad will bring soldiers into the *barranca*, if —— but let my Coyote tell you ——"

"Ay," greedily cried Coyote, "I will tell you that the trains with soldiers must cross the desert, and if in a night we cannot dig the sand from under a rail ——"

"Ay, indeed," grumbled an elder from the gloomy Mesquite Forest, "but we aged ones with few years left,

we think of the years. Our young men cannot forever lie in wait with shovels for trains of soldiers."

"For one year only they will need to," said Krag, "and in the cries and screechings, the hissing of steam, the burning of splintered wrecks, they can shoot their Mexicans by hundreds. That," he said, his mouth drawing to its ugly smile, "is honourable warfare. I will give the young men safe counsel in it."

"Still you forget," protested the forest philosopher, "the years afterward, when this war is a man-hunt, and we have few warriors —— "

"In one year," said Krag, "there will be no railroad, unless the tribe itself desires the railroad. In one year the man — the *Americano* — will dig enough silver to pay back to — to pay back what he has stolen. But he will come also to an end of the silver. I will tell you what I know, which the man does not. The vein of silver bends. It opens on the face of the *barranca*. You can prove that for yourselves. So, when there is no more silver, go and tear up the track and take back your desert for your own."

For a little there was silence. The old men sat dreamily in the sunshine, squinting at the black peaks, or gazed unseeing at the sleek, romping children. One took off his sombrero, found in its crown a cigarette and matches. While he rolled the loose paper over again, a goat thrust her nose into his fingers, and he slapped her away. The elder of San Marcial, from the Rio Matape, was moved to speak.

"Our answer," said he, "unless one of us raises his voice to say no, is as I tell you now. The man, the *Amer-*

icano, shall build his iron road in peace, because of a woman's pity for a Yaqui. That is all."

Each ancient, shaggy head gravely nodded, but as the nods went round, Dolores the girl was up, crying:

"Fools and soft hearts, I was not thinking of the soldiers who will come, but of a solitary white man and his burro, of yet another solitary white man and his burro, of another, and another, and another, until one of them shall pick up the rock he seeks. Then, soon, here in the heart of our sierra, there is a white man's settlement of the *Americanos* who do not tremble for war cries and bullets, and at the last the Yaquis must move again deeper into the West. And what is there deeper in the West that is left us? Fools, it is the sea! — No, no, you see my tongue is loosened. I will not stop — So the railroad comes off the desert into the *barranca?* But it must not come. I cannot tell you all, yet you shall judge. Cajemi's daughter says it must not. She says it must not, because she knows the secrets of the tribe that you think died with Cajemi. She knows them, and they give her right in your councils. She knows where the lost mines lie covered, and she says: 'Beware the white man and his iron road that would enter that *barranca*.' *Hunh*, because Tetibite's heart whimpers for a woman, because also the Lone Oak's ——"

Coyote laughed, jeering. "S-s-s, I was wondering, but it is a woman in her head, not secrets. The secrets, if she has them, are the chief's to keep. Let her give them to me, and I will say if these secrets forbid the road."

An elder made noises in his throat. It was near to

chuckling. "Cajemi lets a girl pick the tribe's secrets from that hard skull!" The words were echoed, for to think her only boasting was relief.

"It is not well for secrets to be with a woman," another soberly declared. "What Cajemi's daughter knows, she must whisper in the chief's ear."

The girl shook her head until the blue-black hair fell from her shoulders and hung like a lustrous, breeze-blown arras before her face. She pretended that not for life would she let them see her mock them. The bewildered old men regarded her helplessly. Derision quivered yet on her lips when she looked up, brushing back her hair.

"So," she said, the words gurgling in rich thickness, "then would I forget secrets with whispering them? La-*la*, la-*la*, but our tribal fathers step where the mire is deep. Poor gray heads, rest easy." Abruptly she shot a look, languorous and wanton, at Krag. "Rest easy, for those secrets I shall keep for the man I take to myself. A woman wishes to be desired, my fathers."

More than one fatuous old man brightened. "Take Tetibite then."

She remembered Tetibite's jeering, and now she jeered at him.

"No," scornfully retorted the young Yaqui. "for I should only learn that she has no secrets. Ancient men, whose blood has cooled, I tell you it is a woman in her head. Look, the warriors have danced themselves hot. It is time to take the trail."

The elders rose on stiffening legs, grunting and glad of release. "Go, Tetibite," they said.

"Cajemi's daughter," added the village elder, "we shall keep her for you, her and her secrets."

Dolores lingered as they went. Krag rose and turned toward his hut. The tread of her bare feet was soft, and he did not hear her until she spoke at his shoulder. "Lone Oak," she whispered, "are you thinking of the woman?"

Krag turned, and saying never a word, he took her nose between his fingers and wrenched it deliberately. This was according to the new strategy.

CHAPTER TWO

The Outcast

THE little brown Mexican soldier, in his glazed fighting cap, dingy uniform, and sandals, can live on maguey and the dew. But where a torrid sun sucks the maguey dry, where the dew is quaffed off by desert sands, who lives? The Yaqui lives, who is himself sand, and slips through the fingers.

This was the superstition of the clumsy, stolid, little brown man concerning his enemy. But superstition is exaggeration. The Yaqui's capacity for the pain of endurance was greater, that was all. It merely took him longer to recognize the perishing state of flesh and blood. Even then, his grief was not for the lack of what one may eat, but for the lack of what may kill. Gunpowder! Little pellets of lead! Even the savage in his warfare must have the sinews of war. This is one handicap from civilization that he may not evade.

In the score and ten months since Cajemi's death, all bone and muscle and wit of the tribe went into fighting, so that none was spared for wage-earning in towns and mining camps. Even the *pacíficos* could not be spared, not when women themselves turned warriors and led the hunted life in cactus and swamp. The very children frowned on bread, and starved to buy ammunition.

Game fled the Yaqui retreats. The Mexicans, travelling their new military road over the old trail, destroyed what growing crops they found. The Yaquis made cakes of crushed roots and rush and straw and wild grasses. But the time came when, though women toiled at their weaving and old men at the potter's wheel, there was little money. The earnings of fifty years were spent on war, all that the Yaquis had made by labour, by their herds and fields of grain, or by their mines, in the days when they had their valley and homes and peace. Cajemi's old custom-house at the Rio Yaqui's mouth, where like a baron of the Rhine he forced toll from every river craft, was lost long since to the Mexicans. Neither could they pan gold from the sands of the river's bank, as they used to do, each man weighing himself out fair wages, because here also were the Mexicans encamped.

Consequently the Yaqui raids became fewer, until only the nearest settlements were menaced. Yet this was not because the Yaquis were fewer, because few were killed, and rarely was one captured. Nor was it because they were less eager, or less daring. It was solely because they lacked the instruments of massacre.

Krag had long pondered the situation. The tribe, it seemed to him, was in its last home, the sierras and swamps. And that home seemed only transitory, to give way soon to slave-ships and slavery in Yucatan. Something in Krag rebelled fiercely against that impending fate of a noble savagery, and his mind never rested from plotting a counter-fate, a remedy, the tribe's life. Yet, while he plotted, he was certain that he was only plotting the success of his own resolute and selfish purposes.

"My Coyote," he spoke one day when things looked most desperate, "some kinds of ore are ground, others melted, and the silver taken out, as simply as women grind corn into *tortilla* paste or melt lard from the pork. It can be done in a cave, and there are caves that no Mexican would ever find. Or," he went on, anxiety deepening the furrows between his eyes, "if the ore is very rich, it can be smuggled a sack at a time into Guaymas, where those shifty ore pirates, the *rescatadores*, will pay rifles and corn for it, and keep the barter a secret. There, I know of no other way. If you would save your tribe, my Coyote, you must work the hidden mines. If you do not, the Yaquis will be driven like peons where these mines can never help them. So bring me pieces of ore from each, and I will tell you which mine to uncover."

Coyote glumly shook his head. The young Yaqui had broadened, was quieter, statelier. Thirty months of chieftanship had sobered the lean runner, had stiffened the supple play of muscles. The cheeks were sunken, the neck was laced in stringy sinews, the chest was a wall of bone. There were scars on him, and one was yet raw. The cold glitter of his eyes was now of famishing. He was grave and haggard. "If I only could!" he sighed heavily.

Krag, regarding him under thick brows, knew a pang, a something that cut oddly and deep. It was like the pang of one who sees a pet grow old, losing its beauty of line and fire of spirit. "My Coyote," he said, "you must."

The Indian's teeth flashed impatience. "You know Cajemi is dead. He took the secrets with him!"

"There is Dolores," said Krag quietly.

A strange flush darkened the coppery cheeks.

"Have I ever lied to you, Coyote?"

Coyote met the piercing gray eyes without flinching. He met them eagerly, even, because of a serene strength that had come to be in them. The squared face of the white man was gaunt, and there was a bullet's furrow across one temple. The great shoulders, the body in its heavy breadth, these also were gaunt. Lines of suffering, or of struggle, had mellowed the hard features. Suffering and struggle had broken the cool poise that was once a sneer. The Yaqui thought the white man's suffering to be hunger. The savage knew nothing of loneliness. But he knew, without looking at the worn laced boots, the tattered khaki, the ragged woollen shirt, what hardship it had cost to follow the trail that no wounded warrior might be wasted. He knew that the surgeon, when the mood came, cursed, and cursed honestly, cursing the wounded under his hand for recklessness, once cursing even him, Tetibite the chief, for shooting down three sullen braves who had misbehaved in battle. The Lone Oak hid no feelings, unless they were kindly ones. The kindly ones he often suppressed, thinking them fraudulent.

"The liar," said Coyote, "is Dolores. My father is only mistaken."

"I am not mistaken," said Krag. "Dolores has the secrets. Marry her, my Coyote. She said that she will give them to the man she takes."

The blood reddened in the Yaqui's high cheek-bones. "I did take her — or she me"—his lip lifted from his

teeth. He said it in one poisonous breath. "No, she has no secrets."

He would tell little more, but Krag saw it all vividly, as red blood in young veins is vivid. After the war *fiesta* and pow-pow thirty months before, Dolores had followed the warriors down the trail. Touched by licking fires, she had whispered to the white man, and he had taken her nose between his fingers. He was lustful, this superb animal of a white man; she sensed it, and it drew her. But she sensed the animal only, and divined nothing of desire for but the one woman. Then instinctively she had turned to her own kind, to one like her who throbbed with the nettling greed of fulfillment, and she followed the warriors on the first march of their raid, and that night when they lay scattered in their blankets, she crept to the young chief. But never was the white man, and his scorn of her, out of her mind.

"But for more than two years no one has seen her," said Krag.

"Have *I* then?" retorted Coyote. "See, has she woven a new *serape* for me?" Wofully he held out his once white blanket, worn thin even to ravelling. "Or does she follow me to the hunt? Yet, being mad as she made me for her that night, I said: 'We will go before the tribe, and have the marriage feasting,' and I handed her my loaded rifle, to fire in air, as I would do for her. It is the wedding bond, the right of death over one who is faithless. But she called me 'pig,' the slut, and laughed, gurgling in her throat, while her lips were on my neck. Before the sun rose, she was gone. Since then I have not seen her. She is an outcast from the tribe."

"But the hidden mines? The secrets?"

"She laughed again, when I asked her for them."

"My Coyote," said Krag, "go and find her. Listen, Cajemi told me as he died that she has the secrets. Go then, and find her."

The Yaqui went, grim before his tribe's necessities, but promising nothing.

CHAPTER THREE

Ghostly Wings

A FORTNIGHT later Coyote reappeared. He came back alone to the little sierra village of Chihuitl, and went straight to the hut of the Lone Oak. The desert's white powder was ground into the tawny seams of his neck, and clung to his sandals and rusty leather breeches despite the bruising of mountain rock. Either anxiety or serious enterprise impending was in his manner.

Krag's keen eyes noted the powdered alkali and the Yaqui's stress. "The boy has found Dolores," he thought; "found her in the desert or beyond." The years flooded on him with their weight of triumph. "And he has the secrets! He has them!"

Coyote wet the dried froth on his lips with the tip of his tongue. "I come for you," he said, "and you will be glad to come. We go to the *barranca* you know of."

The *barranca!* That was the key word, Cajemi's key word to the *Veta Negra*, and confirmed the white man's hope. For Coyote meant the *Barranca Quebrante*, the cañon where Hacklette's railroad crawled off the desert into the sierra, where Krag had staked the spurious *Veta Negra* and baited it with ruin for Hacklette, where the real, the genuine, the fabulously rich *Veta*

Negra must surely be! Krag was quite satisfied of that. Old Cajemi, mumbling his last, had uttered the word. Then Dolores, exasperating the council of old men, had warned them to let no railroad come into the *Barranca Quebrante*, yet would not tell why.

Since then Krag had scoured that definitely located gorge from the little brook's first cascade down to the wet sand on the desert's margin. With all his prospector's craft, he had stealthily explored either precipitous face of the cañon. But great surfaces of those towering walls were hidden from his sight when he was in the gorge below, and inaccessible from the perilous ledges above. He decided that nature herself hid the treasure, as if in mid-air. He trod the pebbles below, the jagged rocks above that treasure. But no miserly talons might clutch it.

Now, he reflected, Coyote had come from Dolores. For the tribe's sake Dolores had told him where to find the *Veta Negra*. And as the *Veta Negra* was in that *barranca*, Coyote had come for him to go to that *barranca*. Coyote needed him, the skilled white man, to bring out the ore secretly, to prepare for its smuggling to the samplers in Guaymas; in a word, to work out the tortuous alchemy whereby the tribe might convert silver into death.

So the years had brought their triumph in one tumultuous flood! He had procured wisely that Coyote should be chosen chief, since to the chief must fall the tribe's dazzling secrets. And though they had fallen instead to a stubborn girl, yet had he overleapt even this obstacle. He needed but to go with his Vale Coyote — whom he had rescued from death five years before for precisely

such a purpose — and lay his hands on the Black Vein's unthinkable bonanza. To make it his own, afterward — that were the simplest exercise in the manual of villainy.

His mule, the tough little beast he rode now, was brought him from the village corral by the "doctor's assistant," a dozen-year-old incipient Yaqui warrior of globular belly and protuberant ribs The child buckled on Krag's spurs, watched him mount, was watching his jog-trot departure in Chief Tetibite's wake, when he burst forth hallooing and came running after.

"There is an old woman," he panted. "She is an old, old woman. She is a *curandera*."

Krag bent a tuft of the lad's stiff black hair in his fingers. "Well?"

"She wishes to speak with the Lone Oak. She is a Pinto woman, surely."

Krag frowned. He resented a minute's delay, after five years' delaying. But the last three of those years had fastened a habit of the soul on him. The wish of any fellow creature was become matter for consideration. "Bring her," he said, with a serenity that was near to benevolence. Nor was there hint of struggle. That fight had been fought out long since. The composure of the man was the calm empire of mastery. "Bring her quickly," and he gave the hair a twisting reminder.

"She came riding on a burro," said the boy, unafraid. "It is an old, old burro." He scampered off to the hut of the village elder, where a toothless and foolishly grinning beldame had come inquiring for the Lone Oak. She was a Pinto. There were tattooed smears on face,

breast, and arms, creased by leathery wrinkles. She was also a medicine woman, a *curandera*. A round green leaf was plastered on each withered temple. Her eyes were bleared from the smudge of brewing herbs.

The Yaqui youngster herded her forward. "Take care, I think she is a *bruja*," he cried; and witch, she doubtless thought herself.

"Well, what?" demanded Krag, for she only looked up at him with her toothless, foolish grin.

She held up her hands; talons, rather, with crooked claws. "Blisters," she said indignantly, in cracked accents, "you see them? They are blisters."

"Well, well?"

"They are from sweeping, sweeping, and my broom sheds its straw like a scalded goose. And I weep, and moan, and wail, yet — yet not a devil of the *calentura* stirs." She cocked her frowsy head, and leered at Krag in professional gravity. "Not a devil, remember, leaves the body of the possessed one — *oo-ee*, *oo-ee*, is it not then the hour to die?"

"Is this a consultation?" Krag asked soberly.

The hag grinned, not understanding. "The woman," she chattered on, "put her hands to her ears. She cursed my wailing at devils. 'The Lone Oak! Go to the Lone Oak!' the woman said, and with her nails she tried to scoop forth my eyes. Art thou the Lone Oak? *Oo-ee*, what can it matter? The child must die, since not a devil ——"

"The child?" Krag demanded sharply.

"Eh? The woman's child."

"What woman?"

"A woman. The daft woman, for she cursed my wailing. The lone woman, who lives in our village."

"Take me to her," said Krag, as by rote, by habit. "Wait! Where is your village?"

"Nay, do not come, for it is far, and the child will be dead, since no root, no bark ——"

"Shall we cut out thy tongue?" cried Coyote. "Now where is the village?"

"Far, I said. And hast thou, chief, no fear whatever, of an evil eye? Far, in the swamps of the coast, our men are pearl divers, and they think less of sharks than of the evil eye."

Toward the coast, to the gulf? That was westward. And Coyote's mission, the *Veta Negra*, the goal of five years' waiting, lay to the south. Yet no struggle distorted Krag's features. His expression was clouded, nothing more. He turned to Coyote. "You will not say why we go to the *barranca*. But tell me, is it life and death to the tribe that I go with you?"

"No."

"Or life and death to any Yaqui?"

"No, my father."

"Then," said Krag, "you will have to go alone."

By acts like this, so that he was himself in them, Krag had laid a foundation of trust day by day, as the weeks and months dragged past. And he could not risk the structure now by turning his back on a call of human suffering, however obscure and unpromising the call might be. He could not, though by refusing he might grasp the object itself of all this strategy of pity. For the very reason that his ambition beckoned on the one hand, he

must turn to suffering on the other. Such his remorseless policy exacted, to waive no jot of it even to compass the purpose of it. There was yet another article of the compact. He must be himself. Therefore he gave way to his reluctance.

"Don't think, Coyote," he muttered, "that I *want* to go. But there's this consolation, to find the brat already cold when I get there. At least I hope——" He paused, queerly questioning within himself if this were strictly true. The doubt disturbed him like the rush of ghostly wings. Saying no more, he patted the Yaqui chief on the back in farewell.

CHAPTER FOUR

The Fairy Tale that Was Different

DOWN into the coast country, to the wet brush country lying low about the mouth of rivers, Krag on his mule followed the shrivelled Pinto woman. She led him at last to a jungle village where a scattering of huts, of thatch and plaited mud-daubed twigs, was fairly lost in the rank turmoil of vegetation. Swamp and lagoons and natural moats, filled by the backing of the sea, cut off the desolate clustered abodes from the knowledge of mankind outside. Decaying fish burdened the air, and water-fowl made noisy the dense little world. Naked children romped in puddles. Women squatted before their huts, twisting reeds into matting. The men — fishermen, pearl divers, smugglers — laboured hip deep in fish traps or strung their catch in the sun. They jeered at the Pinto medicine woman, seeing she had brought a white doctor, and raked her professional pride sorely.

"But the *chiquito* is dead?" she protested, smirking at the first ones they passed.

"No, no," they shouted, "he is still warm, still burning with fever, the *chiquito*," and she smiled foolishly in her chagrin, whereat they jeered again.

"*Oo-ee*," she retorted, lashing her burro, "then it's because he's a tougher breed than thou."

Through pools of water the burro splashed, the mule behind, and they came to a hut deep in the tangled vine. The hag called out, slipping from the stuffed sack on the burro to the ground. "Eh fool, he is here, the Lone Oak. Now give me the pearls."

A coppery arm brushed back a matting that closed the doorless entrance, and a woman's face appeared. A *rebosa* wrapped her head and covered her mouth and nose. Great wasted eyes shot a hungry look at Krag. Hastily she tore from her breast a strand of pearls, and thrust them into the hag's clutching fingers.

"Now my chief will live," she laughed wildly. "Come!" she cried to Krag.

A tigress, could she summon aid to her dying cub, would utter the cry as the woman did. The ferocity of animal mother-love was the same.

Krag thought he remembered the strand of pearls. And when he heard the voice, rich and vibrant still, he knew it was Dolores.

"Coyote — Tetibite — did not find you then?" he exclaimed.

She shook her head impatiently. The male animal was forgotten. "Come," she urged, her eyes suddenly dangerous. In Krag himself she saw only a medicine chest.

He stooped to pass the matting and fell back. The stench within was ghastly. The mother dreaded each breath of air, lest it chill her fevered babe. Krag tore away the matting with a sweep of the hand, and in almost the same gesture he caught her wrist and twisted free the knife she held.

"As though I were here to argue methods," he grumbled.

He plunged into the hut, groped toward where the pallet would be at the back, felt the touch of flesh that burned his own, and gathered into his arms a little human form. "Make way there!" He shouldered the mother from the door-way, and carried the child past her into the air. He stripped it of covering, and wrapped it round in his own clean blankets.

"Burn every rag," he ordered. "The Yaquis would be ashamed of dirt like this. Get rid of that filthy witch. She is falling asleep."

Thus he changed the medicine, holding his patient, a tiny, straight-limbed, two-year-old Yaqui boy, while he browbeat the mother into helpful obedience. By nightfall the hut, or the bare shelter that was left of it, was fumigated, scalded, and aired as clean as a whistle.

All the while he held the babe; held it tenderly. As the tiny, pink-red morsel stirred in its far-away, troubled region of fever, as he felt its searing breath on his hand, cleansing lungs and blood of poisons that had stifled it, he knew that the piteous stress, the valiant battle of the little sufferer, were projected into a tingling, a yearning, through his own great frame. As he watched, clasping the soft bundle, and thought that it would have died that night, he slowly grew aware that — at least he doubted if he were not glad he had come. He wondered — yet could it be?— if an empty habit of the soul were becoming the soul itself, inevitably rebuilding the ethereal tissue, filling out the substance to the shell, until there was this sensitive, quivering nothingness in him that

tingled and yearned — yes, and sorrowed — over a little life that he might save.

"That moss dry yet?" he questioned gruffly. He was ill at ease with himself, as before a strange master. Perhaps, he thought, the soul is touchy machinery, and mortal fingers were rash to meddle in it. "Quick, then, Dolores, and we'll make him his new bed."

The case was simple. Understanding eyes, alert through the hours of danger to the crisis, and a lusty small Yaqui would be preserved to his tribe. There were no such eyes to trust except Krag's own. He settled himself by the little woodland couch beneath the thatch to stand the watches of the night. Temperature, breathing, heart beats, semaphores of the flesh in distress, he read as plainly as rockets at midnight, and heeded them according to the varying message. The mother was crooning over her babe, sometimes with her guitar, mumbling phrases in its ear that the white man could not catch. The accents were smothered in wild, jealous mother-passion, and were too tense for merely a lullaby. Krag, provoked and warned by the child's tossing, ordered her away from the crib.

"Besides," he said, "there is something I have to say to you, since Coyote did not find you. Make me first some coffee, the blackest you can; then sit there."

He had not slept for two nights in coming, and when he had drunk, he made her sit in the door-way and said:

"Dolores, do you know that soon the Yaquis must begin falling? Like flies they will fall."

In the darkness her shoulders lifted, and she half flung out an arm. He knew that the gesture was not indiffer-

ence. It was poignant despair for her tribe, a gesture to say that she was helpless. "I am a woman," she said.

"To the last man," he added.

"But let them wait, and I will give them a chief. Oh,"— she started up, crying —"he does not breathe!"

"He is breathing quietly, that is all; go back.— But when your little chief here grows up, he will be a chief without a tribe, unless — you save his tribe for him now."

She sank listessly in the door-way, and gazed at the dim sheen of stars on the wet earth. "I know," she said, "you mean the secrets. But the secrets are — for him." She jerked her head defiantly toward the child. "I keep them for him. Then he will be chief. Then the Yaquis will make him chief. He is the son of a chief, he is the grandson of a chief, he is an outcast, with his mother. Enough, for his mother will see him chief also, because of the secrets. And you ask me to rob him, my little chief!"

"A chief without a tribe?"

Again she shrugged her shoulders. "Better no tribe than one that Mexicans can conquer," she said. "I"— it was a stifled shriek — "do not hear him breathing!"

In pity he let her come, to satisfy herself. On her knees she laid her cheek to the babe's, and trembled until she felt its breath. But she stayed so, and soon was crooning as before, passionately, jealously. The child stirred. The low moan of its troubled breathing rose feebly again.

Krag needed but to let her alone, and the mother would kill her child by morning. If the child lived,

the tribal secrets were locked in the mother's breast for twenty years or longer. Krag could not wait that long. Twenty years would bring his own age close to fifty. Very likely twenty years would bring Hacklette, scathless, to the grave. In mercy, then, let a foolish mother coddle her young! Krag remembered, too, the tribe's dire need of those secrets.

"Dolores," said Krag softly, "go back now to the door." He had reflected, quite simply, that it was not according to the new strategy. But, while bathing the child's hot brow, he caught himself murmuring: "You poor little son-of-a-gun," as though he owed him something for the black thought of a moment ago. Cold adept in the human heart, he feared he had been imbibing somewhat "of the common heart." To be sure, this meddling with one's own soul was risky business. In such phrasing he might think flippantly, but he discovered that he was not feeling so. That self-trouble of his was swelling to awe, as if, to pay the devil's coin, unwittingly he had sold his soul to Heaven. He wondered about it as he sat there; wondered if he were growing aware of a celestial foreclosure. Then he came back, as he always did, to one word, one vision, one sorrow. "Maisie," he whispered.

A quaint sputtering of baby prattle roused him to his patient. "How now," he murmured, bending over, "the chief awakes! No? Yes? Else he's delirious."

The chief was somewhat of both. His urchin mind was not solid on its pins as yet, or like a dazed old raven was trying to rehearse a speaking part.

"Oh, well, maybe it's not very important," said Krag;

"take your time. Like a little bit o' milk? Well, chief, howdy to *you*, sir. Now, back to the sandman — so!"

But the doughty warrior would not back to the sandman. He kept on struggling to the front; rather, the dazed old crow cawed and hopped about in the lean, copper skull.

"Oh, all right," said Krag, "only don't wake your mammy," and Krag dropped again into his desolate self-communion, paying small heed to the babbled syllables picked out of a misty brain and slipped off the tongue. A Yaqui babe, the same as other two-year-olds, likes to adventure on the wonderful, newly found region of speech, and Krag meant to let him talk himself back to natural slumber. It was Yaqui equivalent for a Mother Goose rhyme, no doubt, that the chief was trying to piece together, and the Guardian Science watching over him smiled at a phrase now and then, and paid no attention.

Now Dolores, overcome by sleep in the door-way and snoring voluptuously, heard the faint lisping through her own clangour. Instantly, with feline lightness of bare feet, she was at the crib of boughs and moss, and bending over her cub. The little mouth and tiny glistening teeth she covered with her lips.

"Here," Krag interposed, "he's all right, Dolores. Let him go to sleep."

She flashed him a wild look of distrust, and held the smothering kiss.

"Your imp is all right, I tell you," Krag insisted. "But you'll fret him into danger. Come!" He gripped her shoulder, and lifted her to her feet. Then he saw

that she had laid the palm of one hand over the child's mouth. It was then that he began to suspect this latest maternal ferocity. He took her by the arms, and firmly turned her from the crib. Her hand, drawn from the child's mouth, released a feeble torrent of baby patter.

" . . . *ba* — (then a desperate *burring* note) — *anca*. . . ."

Krag's ears burned. The Spanish word *barranca!* It was a lone, inadvertent foreigner in the Yaqui throng of words. It was unrelated, friendless, isolated. He could piece it in nowhere. But inspiration burst on him like a shattering globe of fire. Dolores — her darkening suspicion — her wild anxiety? So, neither could Dolores wait twenty years. Her fierce mother-passion must anticipate time. In yearning fancy she would give her chief his birthright at once, and every hour live anew the joy of her fervid make-believe, crooning low, rapturously, in his ear. They were secrets she crooned, his tribe's fatal secrets, in lieu of lullaby; secrets for which human bones strewed the mountain trails, for which a nation was exterminating a race of men, for which the good physician in the Indian hut was a good physician, for which he was cursed and desolate, forsaken by those he had forsaken, for which, like the rest, he would enter hell; and secrets that were a cradle song in a baby's ear!

"Some more of this will soothe him to sleep," Krag said quietly, giving a sedative. He no longer sought to drive her back, knowing what he knew, until the small warrior head drooped over on one cheek and the eyes closed and the tongue was still. Then Krag sat himself

in the darkest corner of the hut and let his brain have its will.

"*Barranca*" was an alien bit. It fitted in nowhere. The rest of the sectional puzzle-picture was lost. Krag marshalled each syllable and sound that he could recall of the infant prattling. They made only gibberish, Mother-Goose gibberish, Yaqui Mother-Goose gibberish, a baby's Yaqui Mother-Goose gibberish — thus he went on building up to nothing, and building up again. But he did not stop, give up. He kept on. It was a habit of his loneliness. Hours and hours, and another time, other hours, he had lived through by trying to fancy, for instance, a universe of four dimensions. "No two straight lines are equal," he said, and imagined a geometry. "Man bartered memory for foresight," he said, and reared a philosophy. He pulled a snail from its house, and built a new cosmos for it. He annihilated a grain of sand, and relocated the solar system. He bade the sun stand still, and peopled the world anew. Or these things he endeavoured to do. It was mechanical. He had to. His brain would not stay empty, now that Hacklette, who once had crowded it, was cast out. For that matter, neither could his soul remain a vacuum, since for the nonce he had driven forth hatred. He was only beginning to realize, of late, that some other soul stuff had been filling in. But this gibberish. . . .

"*And the great big earth cracked way — way open and — and — the great big earth bust a blood vessel.*"

That was all of it he could piece together. He translated it over into an American youngster's lisping tongue. He tested it by every tale and song he knew of Indian

folk-lore. But he identified nothing. It was unique. Long he pondered it. There was plenty of time. Five years of time were behind him; seven, since he had first come to this country resolved on treasure. There was plenty of time ahead of him. So he kept on pondering. Sometimes he jerked himself together, jerked himself wider awake, dug spurs into his brain, goaded it out of the rut, lashed it across country. He pondered gibberish on and on, across country, in the rut, driving like a weary fiend to invisible portals that would not open. Yet when morning broke, and he rose to awaken Dolores, gently, with the toe of his boot, and asked for more coffee, he knew that the secret of the *Veta Negra* was his, that the hoard of the mighty Black Vein was his.

He had turned his back on what seemed the certainty of treasure to follow a loathsome hag on an errand of mercy. And his reward was the treasure! It was like the old tale of the youth who carried a beggar woman's fagots, and the beggar woman was really a fairy with power to reward. But Krag's charity was calculation. His charity was of a piece with his strategy for achieving the treasure. He smiled. It was a grisly smile. Yet it was a sad smile, too, as old as the world, and *tired*. "Superb bunco," he muttered, "I've even fooled Heaven!" And he discovered that he was sorry. He liked the fairy tale better.

CHAPTER FIVE

The Mystery of a Pepper Tree

A PHILOSOPHER has owlishly declared that the hardest task in all this world is to think. It is also the very easiest. For the greater part of his vigil beside the Yaqui child, Krag found it the hardest thing. But a waif, an intruding imp, only a remembered name, alighted in his brain, and suddenly he found it the easiest thing. Idly, casually, shiftlessly — or was this thinking, too? — the name of the *Barranca Quebrante* wandered into his meditations, as for that matter the Latin for quassia bark or the date of the Norman Conquest might have done. *The Barranca Quebrante?* He recalled that Maisie had found the grammar of it unsatisfactory. Why a *breaking barranca?* What could a *barranca break?* Shouldn't it be the *Barranca Quebrada,* one that was *broken?* No, Krag ejaculated, no, not at all! Whereupon the balky steeds of thought reared and plunged headlong.

. . . "*and the great big earth cracked way — way open and — and — the great big earth bust a blood vessel.* . . ."

A crack in the earth? — that was a *barranca.*

A blood vessel? — that was a vein.

A *barranca* "busting," severing, a vein? Ergo, the *Barranca Quebrante!*

And the vein was the Black Vein, the *Veta Negra.*

"In the face of the *barranca,*" dying Cajemi had muttered. Krag contemplated incredulously his own density. Yet it was true, for he had never, until now, reflected that the *Veta Negra* must be the prolongation of the spurious *Veta Negra* across the *barranca,* beginning in the face of the opposite cliff.

Krag, however, waited until his little informant was past danger before setting forth to make sure.

Astride his mule, leaving the swamp country behind, threading the upward trail into the sierras, Krag was the only white man in this world who would not have perished of a Yaqui bullet through his brain. Yet to all visible intent he was alone with his thoughts. There was temptation, then, to drop the bars and let in the blackest of thoughts, and with them the banished Hacklette; to let those demons of thought drag Hacklette down, design for him ruin, humiliation, beggary. For to this Krag would devote the hoard of the Black Vein.

But, he must make sure of the Black Vein first, and resolutely he kept up the bars. Serenely, almost sweetly in reverie, he plodded onward toward the *Barranca Quebrante.* No feature of Hacklette once crossed his mind's eye. Krag put him taboo while the vision was yet vague, and there was the end of it.

The first quarter hour that Krag had endured life without that vision was an eon of triumph. He had locked it from his soul, his will in agony braced against the doors. Another time the quarter hour grew into a half hour,

then became an hour. At last a day passed without Hacklette, then days at a time; finally, a night. He had fallen to sleep, had slept, without the vision! It was the peaceful slumber of a babe. That broke the ghost's back. For more than a year now Krag had not once looked on the Moloch visage of hatred. To lack that carrion nourishment was become a habit of the soul.

Contemplating the long ears of his hard-headed mule, Krag reflected that he had better be occupying himself with how he should possess the treasure. He might, with heart sufficiently lost to decency, do either of two things. One was to reappear in civilization and account vaguely for his five years' disappearance. He could say that he had been wounded and captured by Yaquis while out prospecting, and as evidence point to the furrow of the Mexican bullet across his temple. After that the Yaquis had kept him to tend their wounded, especially as they saw that he was not quite right in his head and that his memory was a shaken leaf. But gradually — and here he would ask how many years had actually passed — his sense of identity had come back. After that, he had stayed on to exact retribution for his sufferings; and, moreover, had succeeded so well as to surprise the secret of one of the Yaquis' hidden mines. Having thus righted his status with the Mexican authorities, helped perhaps by a driblet or so from the immense Golconda at his command, he could go ahead and realize on his claim. An impregnable stockade and hired battalions would protect his mine from the Yaquis.

Or, on the other hand, he might linger with the Yaquis until they succumbed to the Mexicans. That would

not be long to wait. Then, when the tribe should no longer exist as a race on the earth, and the sierras were open terrritory to the prospector, then he, Krag, would emerge with his tale and stake off the greatest treasure of all, the *Veta Negra*.

But hardly had Krag begun on these meditations when he was taken with a feeling of disgust. Besides, it was not perhaps wise to entertain treachery in his thought yet awhile, since to achieve that treachery he must require for a time longer the Yaquis' trust in him. He needed to reconnoitre the *barranca*. He needed to be left alone to make his surveys and put up his monuments. He could do none of these things once the tribe questioned his absolute devotion.

So the wayfarer reminded himself once more that his baby girl could talk, could walk — why, she was probably going to school! Of course, Maisie's little soft, pink Honey Bunch was past six years old — so high — no, a little taller — going on seven years. Yet he had to remind himself. It was difficult. He always thought of her first as the wee, unsteady toddler, more in arms than out of them; then, remembering, he would add the years to that mite of babyhood. And Maisie? The change in Maisie was the hardest of all to reconcile. He ought not to be thinking of another man's wife. But he did. No will power, no Lethe, could drown those thoughts, and the one dear memory of his manhood.

Krag did not pass through Chihuitl. He avoided the village for a shorter trail to the *Barranca Quebrante*. He was almost there when the figure of an Indian, lean, famished, wolfish, and straight as a wand, rose among

the rocks ahead and waited for him. It was Coyote. He stood mournfully, his chin on his bony chest, and Krag, riding nearer, saw that the cruel profile was distorted by a rage that knew its own impotence. The chief of his tribe was returning from the *Barranca*. On his belly on the highest overhanging rock he had looked into the gorge, to the glistening rails of the iron road down there, and he had seen old men, women, and children — Yaquis! — herded on flat cars. Perishing of hunger, yet to earn a few *centavos* for their warriors, they had crept out of the sierra to accept peonage on the nearest *hacienda*, and the Mexican soldiers had surprised them. They were destined for the rubber swamps of Yucatan.

"Thanks to the iron road," muttered Coyote, "they will not have to drag their chains across the desert."

Krag did not ask Coyote why there had been no rescue. He knew. One cannot wreck a train filled with one's own people. Nor, if the train be stopped, can one attack with spears, lacking powder and shot.

A thought, never yet considered, forced itself upward. "There is one way," said Krag; "we will make the Mexicans beg — yes, for *peace*, Coyote. And we will say: 'Send back to us our people, and let there be no chains on them.'"

The chief's eyes hardened at the forbidden word, yet bewilderment passed their fury. Here was the strangest of the strange changes that had come over the tribe's good saint. *Peace?* — yet it was the same Lone Oak who had called Cajemi a dog for breaking the splendid Yaqui oath never to cease fighting! The simpler Krag's motives became, the more Coyote shook his puzzled

head and thought him fathomlessly deep. Coyote shook his head now, and missed the truth. Krag himself all but missed the truth. For the truth was, the sojourner among the Yaquis no longer enjoyed the tribe's death struggle as a magnificent spectacle. He no longer wanted these grim fighters to be as unyielding, as admirable as fate. He was willing to admire them less rather than they should utterly perish. Their sufferings troubled him. Their lowering doom revolted him.

"My Coyote" — he spoke in a simple way that betokened helpful strength — "we will make them cry enough. It shall be an honourable peace. The Yaquis shall have back their lands and homes in the valley. The banished ones shall return. But it is to fight, my Coyote."

"With spears, my father?" glumly questioned the Indian.

"No, Coyote, not with spears." Then, as naturally as if the words were not changing his plans for the *Veta Negra*, and shattering, perhaps, the plot of all these years, he added: "Turn now, and come with me."

Whereupon, to his amazement, the Yaqui said: "You are going to the *Barranca Quebrante* —— "

"Am I then?" Krag exclaimed.

" —— but there is no need," continued the other. "She is safe. She did not come."

"She? But Dolores —— "

"No, no, my father. I speak of the woman who — who was — the Lone Oak's wife. She is safe, for she did not come into the *Barranca* with her father."

Dead ashes of the past lifted by the breeze! Krag

listened, plying the Indian to tell of this thing. Maisie was in Mexico. She had come with her father. In a private car she had come, for Hacklette came and went as befitted a large mine owner and railway president, to look over his properties with a sovereign eye and frown.

Coyote, learning that Maisie was with her father, feared that she might also come with him to the mine in the *barranca*. Coming that far, she might wander alone among the mountains, climbing to some height for the view, and be shot or captured by Yaqui scouts who always lurked near. To keep this harm from her, Coyote had gone to the *barranca*, first coming to Chihuitl for Krag to go with him. Despite his jealousy of Maisie the young barbarian meant to give Krag the startling joy — or pain — of beholding her once more, if only from the cliff's edge above when she stepped from the car in the cañon below. But Coyote had to return without Krag, and from the cliff's edge he had beheld, instead, scores of his own people herded like beasts into bondage.

Krag was poignantly touched by the Yaqui's watchfulness over Maisie. He suspected that Coyote's spy service at the Great Stack always had comprehended Maisie as well as hostile regiments. "In this saddle bag," said Krag, "there is sun-cured fish. The weight of it will comfort your stomach. Now come, for after all, we go to the *barranca*. Come!"

The wondering Yaqui turned, and in scorn of curiosity asked no question.

That afternoon the mule was left with a palsied Yaqui goatherd, whose one companion was the last survivor of his flock, and from his dismal mountain home both Krag

and Coyote, retaining only their weapons and a lariat, followed the trail on foot, Indian file. By nightfall they entered the danger zone radiating from Hacklette's railroad terminus in the *Barranca Quebrante*. Krag told Coyote where he wanted to go, and left the rest to the Yaqui's woodcraft.

During the night, Coyote leading stealthily, they crossed the *barranca* near its head, where it was only a shallow *arroyo*. Beyond they circled widely, leaving the little settlement at Hacklette's mine well within the arc of their course. At a point below the settlement, they came again to the *barranca*. Here daybreak found them, lying in a craggy nook on the gorge's precipitous wall. They peered over the edge. Far below a resolute little locomotive was puffing and grunting and tugging away at a crawling serpent of empty cars. To the right a steep ravine sloped downward, emptying in the *barranca* like a great trough aslant. In this ravine, five years ago, Krag had first encountered Coyote, and had then conceived the design of his present quest. There also, that same day long ago, he had located the supposed *Veta Negra*. A high, dusty, bleak hoist-house now covered what had been the caved-in stope, and a stockade surrounded it. The rumble of the cable was faintly heard. There was a sampling mill, a powder house, a machine shop, an office building, cottages, muckers' bunk-houses, a tramway down to the railroad; all the modern equipment commensurate with a huge ore body beneath. They were a monument to irony. They were many futile golden dollars heaped high. But the one man who could read the epitaph shifted his gaze, and his thoughts likewise.

"My Coyote," said this man, "I am looking for something that is hard to find."

The Indian regarded him sombrely.

"Somewhere," Krag went on, "in the face of that cliff across the *barranca* there rests a precious thing. It is Mexican defeat. It is Yaqui salvation. It is a drooling item of private vengeance. We cannot ask so precious a thing to be easy to find, my Coyote. So we will lie here, my Coyote, and all day long we will look."

"Hungry and athirst, ay," said the Indian, "but the bloodthirsty have the keenest sight, my father. Let us then look."

Krag knew already how hard to find was the thing he looked for. Since the Conquest men had searched, and failed. Knowing more than they, Krag had searched and failed. He had challenged every square foot of the cañon's banks for vestige of an old working, for a shaft covered over, a discarded stull, a dump, a trace of fortified enclosure. Each jutting rock and loosened pebble he had questioned for outcropping or float. The veil was impenetrable.

He now believed, however, that to look for surface "sign" or indication was useless. The spurious *Veta Negra* was overlaid by beds of rock. And if the true *Veta Negra* were an extension of the same vein, broken by the *barranca*, then very likely it also was cloaked within the earth, and neither erosion nor outcropping would reveal it. Besides, old Cajemi had said: "in the face of the *barranca*."

To look on the face of the *barranca*, Krag was here. He had looked before, taking the old chief's clue. He

would look again, because of a babe's prattling. The prattling had eliminated miles of the *barranca*, and left for scrutiny one small area of cliff. One need only to imagine the spurious *Veta Negra* projected, like a pipe line, across the chasm, and then locate the entering point opposite.

But Krag could detect nothing on the face of the cliff that resembled a mineral-bearing discolouration. Whether the earth had split to form the gorge, agreeable to Yaqui fancy, or whether the little brook had done the titan job, was not material, for the mountains were older than the *barranca*. Once on a time there had been no *barranca*. The stratification of both cliffs was roughly identical. Because of this little that nature deigned to reveal, Krag would not despair yet of her maddeningly hidden treasure.

"You, Coyote," he asked, "what do you see?"

"I? What is there for a poor Indian to see, my father?"

"Look," said Krag, "for whatever is strange, whatever you cannot understand, and let me have it."

"I see," said the Yaqui, "a bush that should be a tree."

"Where, Coyote?"

The Indian pointed across the gorge to a scrubby growth, a blot of dingy green on the bare rock. It was rooted, apparently, in a ledge of the cliff, thirty feet or more from the top.

"That?" said Krag. "That *is* a bush. It's chaparral or greasewood."

"It is the top of a tree," said Coyote. "The branches are as thick as a man's arm."

"I cannot see the branches,"

"It is a high tree, of the height of four men."

"But the trunk of your tree, Coyote, is it in the solid rock?"

"You asked me for what I do not understand," the Yaqui reminded him.

Until nightfall Krag wondered what had become of the trunk of that tree.

The sun of the next day found him and Coyote lying on the edge of the opposite cliff, at a point directly over the bush that should be a tree.

The edge of the cliff was slightly overhanging, and they could see only a few twig ends and leaves of the tree top below them. But it was a tree, as Coyote had said. Krag recognized the pod and clustered leaflets of the pepper tree. They waited until dusk, although there was little chance of being seen at that height and distance at any time, and Krag went over the edge by the lariat. He released himself in the tree's upper branches. The mystery was then revealed.

In effect it was a tree growing behind a wall, and thrusting its top above the wall. The wall was an upstanding ledge, some ten feet high that jutted up from the cliff like a slab of marble. The crevice formed between was several feet wide, and had been worn into the cliff by drippings from the overhanging edge above. Into the crevice bits of rock had fallen, which had been rotted by the water and crumbled to powder. Then a lichen had gotten root-hold in the sheltered cranny, and for ages lichens had grown and died and feathered their bed with their decay, until the mosses came. And the mosses

had deepened the bed greatly, preparing it for the seed of a later invader. The invader had been a pod of the pepper tree, tumbled over the cliff by the wind, or — planted there by the hand of man! Certainly the tree had grown, and its top now filled the opening of the crevice, until no one might suspect that a crevice was there.

However the tree came there, what Krag next saw came only by the hand of man. It was a rude pick, with handle rotted away, driven and left in the face of the cliff behind the upstanding ledge. Krag took from his pocket a candle stub, lighted it, and carefully examined the metallic material which held the pick so fast.

Krag signalled, by whistling low, and Coyote came sliding down the lariat into the tree, and down the trunk of the tree, and stood beside him in the crevice.

"My Coyote," said Krag, pointing to the face of the cliff, "there is the *Veta Negra*. Tell me, whose is the *Veta Negra?*"

"It is thine, my father."

"Yes, it is mine," said Krag.

CHAPTER SIX

The Prosecuting Witness

WHEN Krag climbed out again by way of the lariat, he stood for a time on the cliff's far edge, and through the starlit night contemplated below him the fringe of the white man's universe. It lay under him, at the bottom of the wild, black gorge — a locomotive headlight and the bumping of freight cars. It lay beyond, obliquely opposite in the ravine, against the sombre mass of mountain — a dull glow in the hoist house, and a yellow twinkling when the cage popped up out of the earth, like a phosphorescent cork. They, gnomes of the sierra and the night, were very busy getting out ore down there. The gnomes, mine, railroad, the universe of the white man, were one thing — Hacklette.

Krag drew a long breath, and when the breath went from him, the flood gates burst open, burst open to the rush of demon thoughts, to the cherished, banished imps of hatred. Now he could take them to his bosom and nourish them, and let them feed on the vitals of his being. The joy of it, long repressed and savagely earned by repression, was his at last, since the Black Vein, the instrument of his vengeance, was his.

Like a man whose tongue has blackened for lack of

water, he awaited the fierce thrill of the quenching draught. He waited and — began to wonder. Still he waited, expectant, and now he was startled, and bewilderment, almost fear, grew on him. The thrill had not come! And, stranger than that, there was no thirst!

Where then, were those fiends of darkness? The brooding on supercilious pride, and wrong, and repayment — where? Krag waited vainly on the threshold, like one defrauded. The evil horde had melted away, had gone, straggling, perishing. The man, remembering how hard it had been to keep them out, was as naïvely astounded as a child who shuts his eyes at night on the hobgoblin terrors of childhood, and awakes to find them mysteriously vanished before the dazzling glory of early morn. As little did Krag know what to make of it. He was bereft of purpose. He wondered if, instead of fooling Heaven, Heaven had not fooled him.

"A mighty queer way," he mused, "to be cheated of five years' vassalage to hell!" His mouth twitched into a smile, and the smile was a fugitive wraith of the old, old whimsical grin of Jimmy Krag's boyhood. But his jaws closed. "I'll not be cheated," he resolved. "I will crush him. Yes, it is quite decided that I will crush him. I will." This was entirely intellectual. The animus, the raging lust, was gone. Only the naked power of will, the deep impress of purpose, remained. He would cleave to this matter as to an unfinished task, to a duty he owed the integrity of his will. And meantime he left the floodgates down. Perhaps the impish horde would reassemble.

He turned to Coyote behind him. The Yaqui chief

had picked up a round stone, and was idly tossing and catching it in the darkness, as in the days when he was a lithe, fleet runner. Some such lightness of the spirit had returned to him. The Indian saw his tribe once more armed and formidable, "My Coyote," said Krag, "let us hurry from here. We have salvation to work for."

He meant Yaqui salvation, all the artful planning to convert lumps of the Black Vein into corn and gunpowder. He turned to it eagerly, though his eagerness surprised him. Hacklette might wait. By Heaven, he would have to wait! Krag confessed that it was weakness, this distress over an Indian tribe. Well, he would indulge the weakness. He had rather earned a little self-indulgence. For years he had been shackled to the man Hacklette, and now the man Hacklette could wait. That was all there was to that. There would be time enough later to attend to the man Hacklette. The present time was for weakness, indulgence, freedom.

"We will lick the Mexicans to a standstill." He wished that he could say it that way in Yaqui. But Coyote's barbarian heart was already throbbing to the same lilt.

They got back that night to the goatherd's lone hut, and became straightway the architects of victory. Or rather, like the genie out of the bottle, the structure reared its silvered dome from the crevice of the pepper tree.

In spite of fable and Mr. Chubbuck and the Spanish archives, the Black Vein was not a hundred feet wide Yet the discount of fact was not unreasonable. Krag found it a dozen feet across, and about the same in depth;

which, however, in other terms may be the measure of battleships. That is to say, legend had this much right: a pick struck in the lode held fast, because the ore was silver and lead of almost virgin purity. The proof was the pick itself. The rusted metal had crumbled away in flakes as Krag tried to pull it out. It had held there possibly a hundred years; had been last used, one could imagine, to pry away that argentous bowlder with which the grateful Yaquis had rewarded a charitable Mexican widow.

Except for such a specimen now and then, appearing at rare intervals like a Mahatma to upset the world of men, the *Veta Negra* had never been a worked mine. It was not one of the *minas tapadas*, covered over and abandoned by the owners as they fled before an Apache or Yaqui raid. Nature had done the hiding, nature and a pepper tree. So here was one clot of cream that the cream-lapping Spaniard had overlooked. Here was a castle, a cathedral, an armada, that he had left behind in the rock.

Krag examined fragments broken from different parts of the vein. Some were stained like a ruby, with native silver, frost-encrusted wires, clinging to them. Coyote's barbaric eyes were fascinated by their beauty. But Krag thought most of a sordid, blackish piece, one that had surrounded the pick, which was as heavy as its bulk of silver dollars. It would run thousands to the ton. Others carried more gangue material, and were not so superbly enrichened, yet were very rich nevertheless. The vein might widen and deepen, or it might be only a very fat pocket tucked away in the cliff.

"No matter," said Krag, "we have enough in sight."

"And many dead Mexicans," whispered the Yaqui.

Krag looked at him benignly. "My Vale Coyote," he said, "whom have the Yaquis to thank?"

"My father."

Krag smiled. "Thank your own son, Coyote."

"My —— "

Then Krag told him of the little sufferer in the fever swamp.

The Yaqui sat silent, staring unblinkingly at the mountains. At last: "She calls him chief?" he murmured.

"Yes."

"Then thou and I, my father, will preserve his tribe to him."

"U'm," said Krag, "a pretty birthday gift."

They plotted it with adequate guile, as the days following and Mexican mortality plentifully certified. The upstanding ledge that hid the vein also hid their working of it. A rope ladder lowered to the crevice at nightfall; two Yaquis ascending, each with a sack of ore, or of waste; the ladder pulled up again — thus was the bonanza scratched. But it was enough, and more would not be safe. Krag mixed the ore with different kinds of country rock, so that the Guaymas broker, or *rescatador*, might suspect neither its original richness nor that it all came from the same deposit. And he did not. He believed that the stuff was gophered out of exhausted or flooded mines, and he was too crafty a buccaneer in contraband to ask a question. Many Mexican miners driving sack-laden burros brought their *rescate* ore to his assay office in Guay-

mas, and it was a matter of easy contrivance that some of them should bring in the Yaqui offering as well. The one thing to bother the *rescatador* — for it touched his purse — was that the Yaquis knew what their ore was worth. He had the odd feeling that he dealt with an unseen white man.

Weeks, months, passed. Effect grew slowly, but realization was abrupt, after the manner of appalling catastrophe. The Mexicans awoke, and noticed that they were being superbly drubbed. They noticed that they had been driven out of the sierra, flying battalions of them, those of them that fled with sufficient haste. Those that did not were overtaken by soft-nosed bullets. Instead of a beaten, famished, skulking foe, a giant had come up refreshed.

This time the general of the zone did not send soldier caps to the capital. The minister of war might ask where were the heads that had filled the caps. He might fill one of them with a new general of the zone. The general of the zone was careful not to provoke repartee. His despatches were laconic. He often had the honour to regret to report, but that came to smell of monotony.

Now the president at the capital was deeply embroiled in peace. Divers bills were waxing payable. There were public works. There were subsidies on new railroads, on vast irrigation projects, on beautification and utility. There were trunk lines to pass into the government's exchequer. There was that expensive thing, the gold standard, to be encompassed. Perhaps there were other items. At any rate the president was weary of footing damages for a brawl off in a crooked lane of his kingdom.

So civilization changed sides at last, and brought forth a smashing wallop in behalf of the poor Indian. Locked in her Pandora box, that bleached-out crow, the dove of peace, fluttered fretfully. Krag perceived that the time drew near when the Yaquis would be asked to ask for what they wanted.

He was considering what they wanted one morning, a little before sunrise, as he stood on the cliff and gazed down into the *Barranca Quebrante*. He had just climbed the rope ladder from a visit down in the true *Veta Negra*. His Yaqui miners had drifted perceptibly on the vein. Crowding the mouth of the tunnel as well as the crevice there were now fifty tons of ore, sacked and ready to be marketed. Enough, and over, to release the dove, he believed. For this ore had not been adulterated with country rock. It averaged two thousand four hundred ounces to the ton. All told there were almost eight thousand two hundred pounds of pure silver in those twelve hundred sacks that would hardly fill a hall bedroom. Something like sixty thousand dollars — yes, that would about do it.

And then what? After peace, what? Krag did not like to ask himself that. But the question was stubborn, and constantly more imminent. For when the Yaquis should win their fight, the motive was gone for Krag to defer his purpose longer. Naught of activity in this existence remained to him but that purpose. To stay with the Yaquis was to dawdle, and for Krag dawdling was uglier than death. He must, then, go again into the world of men, taking with him what he had come for, and do with it that which had goaded him to come for it.

The old fanciful equation again: money equals heart's desire!

However, he did not want to go back into the world. He pictured the utterly dreary loneliness of crowded pavements, of jostling elbows, of laughter and merry voices, of cheery, brightly lighted homes. Whether he met old-time friends or not, whether they took him along to their firesides or not, it would be the same. No, it would be worse. He would be more alone. He shrank from the bleak solitude out there, and clung to desert and sierra, to his wilderness abode and the wild creatures in it, where the breadth of nature and passion made reverie serene, and the soul calm, unclamorous, because the soul knew itself to be so small.

Feeling — not actually thinking — these things, he gazed down into the gorge, which was the fringe of the world where he must soon descend. He often gazed down there, on the quaintly, preposterously busy little locomotives jerking at ore cars, and over to the hoist house in the ravine, listening for the rumble of the cable around the drum. With gazing he would vivify his purpose, invoke the vision of Hacklette in these activities of Hacklette, so that the purpose which had driven him out of the world might violently drag him back again. For he admitted now that possibly, just possibly, naked will power alone might not be enough. But with thinking of Hacklette, he had merely accustomed himself to the idea of Hacklette, until Hackette and all that in him was had flattened out to an insipid platitude. Krag's intellect was the judge, his will the executioner, but his animus, the prosecuting witness, was mute, a supine fat-head.

"If only I could *see* him once," Krag muttered grudgingly, turning from the cliff. "If I could see that hate-breeding, high-bridged nose of his. If I could hear his rasping snarl, perhaps —— "

He stopped. Not fifty yards away, sauntering importantly among the rocks, was a man, a dilettante prospector, a human being in these sierras wearing kid gloves!

CHAPTER SEVEN

God's Machinery

MR. F. DEL. HACKLETTE, president and general manager of the *Compañia Minera La Veta Negra*, president and general manager of the *Ferrocarril Barranca Quebrante y Desierto*, was disturbed by no thought of danger in venturing across the gorge among the cyclopean tumbled rocks on the other side. He went in a smug sense of immunity. For almost three years his property had been singularly exempt from depredation. Mr. Hacklette unconsciously accepted this as a tribute from simple-minded savages to his own ubiquitous mightiness. At the present moment he had an idea that, by virtue of his beetle-browned acumen in large business affairs, he might ferret out another bonanza where experience and geologic knowledge had failed. A second mine would be — uh — acceptable. It would give his railroad more tonnage, and convert that little narrow-gauge branch into a persimmon tree of dividends.

To bring this about was a matter of pride. Mr. Hacklette would have scorned the suggestion that it was in the least essential to the Hacklette purse. In clutching his cigar between his teeth, in buttoning his gloves, in enduring the annoyance of having to give orders to his private secretary, waiter, butler, chauffeur, mine super-

intendent, railroad superintendent, lawyer, and dusky chef of his private car, in each imposing gesture and curt word, Mr. Hacklette was always aware of his tailored figure as a figure of immense riches. He scowled in clannish disdain when he read peppery diatribes against malefactors of great wealth. But he read avidly, because he looked for his own name, and was soured because he found it not. He hungered for universal initiation into the gilded caste. It would have to come soon, he told himself. Potentially he was the Big Four of the Comstock Lode rolled into F. DeL. Hacklette. The alchemy of another Virginia City was his. Only a little longer, and it would be transmuted into stocks and bonds, transatlantic cables, Raphaels and Corots, foreign titles, a yacht, a French château, a scandal, and a swivel chair in the United States Senate — he believed it was a swivel chair.

Financially Hacklette had emerged, puffing like an exhausted swimmer. He had been under more than once. That he pulled himself out at all he attributed to hard-headed business genius, forgetting a certain lifeline. Maisie's little fortune, which he had snatched at the last gasp, was the lifeline.

Despite a shrewd business man's caution, it had been foolishly easy to be a gullible fool. Once his gaze was fastened on the mirage of bonanza wealth, he had swum for it beyond his depth into the gripping undertow. Krag had calculated unerringly as to that.

The thing began when he took Maisie's *Veta Negra* stock. He took it at par, and he paid cash, $230,000. He could not bully Maisie into selling it on any other terms,

quite simply because it was not Maisie's to sell. She was only Krag's power of attorney, and Krag had dictated the terms. Such exasperating foresight rankled in the Hacklette bosom, and very nearly emptied the Hacklette safe deposit vault of its securities.

No law, of course, compelled Mr. Hacklette to buy mining stock at all, but here was guileless Bun Chubbuck home on a vacation, and here were Bunny's specimens running four and five hundred ounces of silver to the ton. Also one read the newspaper stories, the Sunday features, with lurid pictures of centuries-old skeletons in a hidden mine. There was the identification of this mine with the fabulous *Veta Negra*. There was the psychologically potent naming of this mine as the *Veta Negra*. Chubbuck innocently and ardently described the virgin lode that remained untouched. Krag's prediction came true; people's tongues hung out to lap up the stock. Next came Maisie, widowed, perhaps, and Maisie had practically all the stock. It would have taken a law to compel Mr. Hacklette not to buy mining stock. He hired mining engineers. Their report confirmed simple Bun Chubbuck. Then he plunged.

As Krag likewise foresaw, Hacklette treated his bereaved daughter with gracious distinction, with insidious kindness. He toadied. But that prescient power of attorney was not to be wheedled or forced. Hacklette grieved to give so much of his fortune to the possible enrichment of Jim Krag, supposing that Krag were still alive, but he exulted in taking from Jim Krag a prospect that would make Jim Krag a Big Four rolled into one.

Wherefore he paid par, and he paid cash. He had to call in loans to do it, and negotiate paper, and let go some suburban potato patches that he was holding for the tide of population.

At once he put a surveying corps in the Sonora desert, and the Yaquis changed surveying into foot races. The Yaquis behaved similarly toward Mr. Hacklette's construction camps. The work stopped again and again, and the desert was as the original desert. Hacklette negotiated more paper, and sold an office building. Finally he mortgaged the Queen Anne mansion, and ceased to look the bronzed mastiff in the face. All the time he could not get out of his head the idea that his daughter was rich. This was unfilial. Her moneyed case — ready-moneyed ease — grew into an affront. He distinctly regarded it as an affront at the hands of Jim Krag. Then somebody's toe was caught in Jim Krag's bones. They were surely Jim Krag's. Maisie recognized Jim's ring. Her name was engraved in it. She remembered a deep scratch in the ring, when Jim bruised his hand on a rock climbing into the *Veta Negra*. Hacklette consoled Maisie. He stepped softly when he heard her weeping. Her money was now her own. She was not a power of attorney. She was a widow. Hacklette took the money. He had to, to finish the railroad, to support an army along the right-of-way.

The Yaqui discouragements mysteriously ceased, and the railroad was finished. Heavy mining machinery crossed the desert on the first cars. It had to be paid for. It had to be installed. A tunnel had to be dug on the vein, then a shaft, drifts, and winzes. Masses of ore had

to be blocked out. Such development work had to be paid for. And Maisie's money was gone. On the strength of their own engineer's report, the smelter people wanted to get in on the deal. Hacklette would not sell. But he did have to hypothecate his stock. It was all he had in the world to hypothecate. When he reached the bend in the vein, he would be a ruined man.

Hacklette, however, knew nothing of that. He did not know that the vein bent. It was an uncommon thing in geology. He could not suspect that a geologic monstrosity lurked under the mountain, had lurked there for millions of years, waiting to make a beggar of Mr. Hacklette. In frenzied ignorance Hacklette applied every shipment of the rich ore to redeeming his hypothecated stock. He had been shipping now for almost a year, and the stock, to the last share, was home again in his safe deposit vault. He could begin next on the lifting of mortgages, on the rehabilitation of his fortune, on the endless multiplication of his fortune commensurate with the endlessness of the vein. And that vein would wriggle shortly through the boundary line of his claim, and be no more his property! Were the monstrosity a growling beast, the man at the drill in the breast of the vein must have heard it. But the Thing dozed in its lair.

For Mr. Hacklette, then, to go forth and turn up another bonanza was a little affair of recreation. Besides, Mr. Hacklette had awakened as he lay in his private car on a siding, and though it was not yet day, he was preternaturally awake, with millions in silver, a pyramid of silver, on his chest. This often happened, and he

knew from experience that sleep was the span of another day beyond recapture. Accordingly he pressed the button for valet, chef, and secretary, and having dressed, breakfasted, and dictated orders, all with caustic dignity, he stepped from his car, and the crisp fragrance of the mountain air tingled in his haughty nostrils as the breath of endeavour. A morning climb, more millions, such was better than sleep.

Buttoning his gloves, with a cane under his arm, he walked the railroad ties up the gorge. Beyond the terminal of the road, he picked his footing among the stones along the mountain rivulet. He turned to his left, where the *barranca's* high wall broke into a steep tributary cañon; and painfully — resentfully, too, for the labour of it — he gained the height above, near the edge of the *barranca*. Here he went poking about with his cane at exposed strata of rock.

"I shouldn't do that," a calm voice chided him. "You might get yourself scalped."

A quick spasm jerked the muscles along Mr. Hacklette's spine. He swung round, incensed at being taken unawares. He gathered a scattered reserve force to browbeat, to awe, the gaunt and battered and burly rough-looking customer who suddenly filled his eye. He was too greatly startled to consider that there was nothing of menace in the keen and intently curious gaze levelled on him. Mr. Hacklette's discernment rarely penetrated deeper than clothes, and the clothes on the serenely towering individual, to Hacklette's agitated senses, were easily desperado accoutrement — limp felt hat on a rugged, rock-hewn head, faded gray woollen shirt laid open to

a browned, magnificent column of neck, earth-grimed khaki, laced boots rusted and peeled; and all tagged with terror's brand, a sagging cartridge belt and ugly black six-shooters. Yes, and a murderous machete, though it was only for lopping off cactus in the trail.

The stranger perceived the distress that Mr. Hackette was indignantly trying to hide. The hard, questioning gray eyes of the stranger mellowed to a whimsical light — whimsical, but saddened and very tired — and he half chuckled, half grunted. "There, Hacklette" — and Hacklette felt a hand that seemed as heavy as a bag of sand laid reassuringly on his shoulder — "there, I'm Krag — you know, little Yellow Jaunders. But I mean," — he found English words odd on his tongue — "what I say. It isn't safe for you this side the *barranca*, and you will have to run along back."

Krag could not help that attitude. He had no thought of the farcical. He intended nothing belittling. He felt sorry, like a big boy for a little boy. But his attitude, since Hacklette was a man grown and nearly twice his age, was woven of contempt; was bound to be. Krag did not know that he was showing it. He was only abruptly and tragically aware of how absurd it was to dignify this man by an Olympian passion like hatred. He had feared that he might want to kill Hacklette; drop him, in a grandeur of simplicity, over the edge of the cañon. But, at sight of him, the high tension of years snapped, broke to ridiculous ease. He simply felt contemptuously indulgent, as for a vain old turkey cock with feathers on end. He was sorely puzzled, and disgusted, that he could ever have felt any other way. But the big boy did not

take stock of how much the big boy had grown. Neither, for that matter, did Mr. Hacklette. The mine owner and railway magnate, reassured, saw only little Yellow Jaunders, a worm. He caught an iron-gray bristle of moustache between his teeth, and snipped it off. He tightened his grip on his cane, thinking seriously of using it. He became his curt, supercilious self.

"*You?*" he sneered. "What — what are you doing here?"

"Saving your life," said Krag. "Go now, go!"

"But you — those — your bones?"

"A man's bones are his own," said Krag — talking English again seemed like a resurrection — "but you needn't leave yours here. There are Yaquis within gunshot. You must go back."

Hacklette did not hear. "You — you were not killed?"

"No! Do you want an affidavit?"

A rush of poignant questions, none of which he could ask, swept over Hacklette. What if this tramp were taken with a notion to resume life in the world? What if this inscrutable son-in-law demanded the fortune taken from his wife? Hacklette's composure was outward only. His eyes focussed austerely over the high-bridged nose. "Why," he inquired subtly, "ain't those Yaquis shooting then?"

"I told them not to. But the next time —— "

"You booby!" cried Hacklette. "I thought I'd catch you! So the Yaquis are your friends, eh? Well!" His lip curled. "Sunk to dirty Indians, eh? Well! Got a squaw, too, I guess." For a pause he whiffed the stench of it. Then he foreclosed, as hard as

flint. "Now you skut, listen to me." The words were bitten off and spat at him. "We've been shut of you for five years, see, and we want more of the same. Show your head out of these mountains, and I'll make the relief permanent. Get that? Ask me how. Because I'll denounce you to the Mexicans, and they'll shoot you on sight! Do you — you get it all?"

Krag listened with intent interest. Here was an honest sample of what had been exasperating in the man, and Krag was not exasperated. He was meditating, instead, on the cruelties of time revealed in the puffy sacks blown under Mr. Hacklette's eyes, the flabby pouches about the corners of the mouth, the lumpy jaws, and little globular belly that would be a capitalistic paunch. Rather than antipathy, Krag felt shame for him. For Krag was the host now. In a way, these sierras — expanse, height, breadth, truth — were his home, and he was entertaining a stranger here.

"You heard me?" said Hacklette.

"Eh, oh, yes," said Krag. "But the Mexicans," he stated, "would give me time, prior to execution, for the recovery of a stolen sum of money, about two hundred thousand dollars. I could always interest the Mexicans in a sum like that, you know. And I suppose they still have penitentiaries up in the States. So if that is why you would have me shot, it is also why you would never ask to have me shot, and I was entirely safe in revealing myself to you just now for the purpose of saving your life."

"How did you know — how —— "

"Know what?"

"That I took — that I —— "

"That you stole my two hundred thousand dollars? But I didn't know it. I'd only heard it. But let that pass. The thing now is: you must restore that money to — to Maisie — and — and Bunny."

"Bunny?"

"Yes, Bun Chubbuck."

"Chubbuck? What —— "

"I want him to have that money. She's *my* baby girl, isn't she? And Chubbuck is the kind to find it hard enough to support Maisie — to support two — without having my baby girl . . . No matter, you give them back that money."

Out of the helpless bewilderment on Hacklette's face there grew a look of relief. He gulped painfully. The look narrowed to craft and cruelty.

"Yes," he sneered, "she took the precaution to get a divorce first."

"Of course she would," said Krag.

"Precisely," said Hacklette, swallowing hard. He took a cigar from a soft leather case, clipped it with his pearl-handled knife, and rolled it between his lips. "But if she should happen to learn that you're alive — the shock —— "

"You are not going to tell her, are you?"

"Hell, no, but you —— "

"Wait," said Krag. "You will have to pay her back that money."

"If —— "

"You will," Krag went on, "turn over to her your ore settlements from date, until it is all paid. Then you will send me a receipt, signed by her and Chubbuck. You

will place it, weighted by a stone, on this rock." He laid a hand on the rock he meant.

"If I do not?"

"Do you really want the answer to that question?"

"I —no, no!"

"Then go. Cross the *barranca* just once more to bring the receipt. Once more than that . . . Anyhow, I don't want the Yaquis to kill you."

But Hacklette could not go yet. Somehow the serene outlaw had robbed him, maimed him, trussed him up. Worse than six-shooters was mild indifference. Power and pose must strike one blow before he quit the field.

He gripped his cigar anew, let the blue smoke cloud his eyes, and frowned smugly through it at Krag. "You recall Cleft Rock, I guess? You ain't forgot it?"

A shade of annoyance passed over Krag's face.

"And what you said to me that day?"

"I was a young, sullen, grudge-hided fool," said Krag.

"Well, I guess! You —— "

"For giving you a word or a thought."

"Eh? — But you drooled something about taking my money away from me. You was going to ruin me. I think it was to be by the next time we met."

"It must have sounded disgusting."

"You remember, don't you?"

"Yes, I remember."

"Well," said Hacklette — he waved his hand over the cliff, taking in the railroad below, the mine buildings in the ravine, and particularly the private car on the siding — "well, we've met now, ain't we?"

"Hacklette," said Krag patiently, "I wish you would go. I don't want to leave you while you're in danger."

"But you *promised* to ruin me, you know," Hacklette insisted.

"A promise?" Krag repeated. "That's a lien on a rational creature's future, isn't it?"

"Even if the creature welches," Hacklette laughed nastily.

"Let me ask," said Krag, "how far have you drifted over there?" He pointed to the spurious *Veta Negra*.

"Oh, a thousand feet, more or less, on all the levels," said Hacklette proudly. "I'm one to push things."

"And at this moment you are penniless except for that mine, and the railroad, which is worthless without the mine."

"Eh, who — that's none of your business."

"I'm afraid, Hacklette," Krag confessed without triumph, "that I have kept my promise."

The cigar dropped from the magnate's parted teeth. He tried to laugh at the start the other gave him. "I see," he said, "you're sore. Just sore, and ugly about it. But you couldn't develop a property like that yourself, you know. It took a moneyed man."

"But I did try to save you," added Krag.

"Thank you for not succeeding! How?"

"It was nearly three years ago," said Krag, "about the time the Yaquis stopped molesting your railroad. One of your surveyors found my saddle bags, in a clump of chaparral, near where those bones had been found two years before that. Some bits of float, notes, and so on, were in the bags; particularly a memorandum, apparently jotted down during that last and fatal prospecting trip

of mine. The memorandum was about my claim, your *Veta Negra* down there. Did you get it?"

"Never paid any attention to it," grunted Hacklette. "How could you know more'n my experts what's in the ground?"

"I hoped at the time it wouldn't stop you," said Krag. "But I did try. It was a — a system I was playing."

"System, eh? Oh, ho, thought you'd scare me off the mine, eh, and come back to work it yourself?"

"And now," said Krag quietly, "I believe I am sorry it did not stop you."

"Shouldn't wonder. Any rat would, that gets poisoned by his own fangs."

"That," said Krag, in a voice as low as a whisper, "I know that is true."

"Shouldn't wonder again," said Hacklette. "You see the results, I guess." He waved a contemptuous hand back over the wilderness of wandering and man's desolation. Then the gloved hand swept his own estate, railroad, mine, private car. Suddenly his eyes contracted malignantly. "Look — there!" He pointed direct at a snow-white speck down in the gorge. "Well, I shouldn't wonder, really."

Krag saw that it was a child, a little girl, near the private car. She was playing on the edge of the tiny brook, making a dam of pebbles. Krag gestured toward the white speck, mutely questioning. Hacklette noted the dumb suffering in the man's eyes.

"One guess enough? Well, yes, that is our little Alice Krag — uh, Chubbuck, I should say. Confusing to keep the old name, you know."

"It can" — the father hesitated — "it can be arranged for me to see her. Tell her I'm one of your— your muckers. Pass it off casual, that way — Come!"

Hacklette seemed to be weighing the feasibility of the plan. Thus he fed on the other's hunger, and kept him waiting. He loosened stones near the cliff's edge and pried them over with his cane, to hide by lowered, meditative head what was on his lips. When he looked up, he flaunted the grinning sneer.

"You said you remember Cliff Rock, I believe?"

Slowly Krag got the meaning of the question, and the stricken gray eyes cleared, fixed on this man.

"I see that you do," Hacklette went on. "You tricked me out of my daughter that day, and later deserted her. Now answer! Don't you think you've got one ghastly nerve to come whining around me for *your* daughter? Eh, don't you?"

But the gray eyes troubled him. They were searching, fathomless, and in judgment over him. Then a bewildered contempt, as for something unbelievably mean and vulgar, grew into the eyes. But abruptly the man seemed to sicken. Krag saw himself in this unbelievably mean and vulgar thing. The vile code: "An eye for an eye . . . " It was this, his past self, that sickened him.

"And see here," cried Hacklette, "you keep away from my car down there! I've got guards down there and you're the same as a Yaqui. Come where we can pot you once, and —— "

The wickedest flaw in human society is that one man can ever be in the power of another man.

"If you had a friend," said Krag, so earnestly that he

might have been that friend, and sorrowfully, as from a terrible knowledge, "he would implore you, for your own sake, not mine, to keep your soul's fingers out of God's machinery. Man, man, you don't know what you are doing!"

Hacklette's brows lifted mockingly. "Threats, eh?"

But Krag had turned and left him. Alone in the wild silence of the place, Hacklette skulked behind rocks. His spine twitched fearfully until at last he had climbed down safely into the cañon. He was not wholly himself until he was under the whisk broom of his valet in his private car.

CHAPTER EIGHT

A Shipment of Ore

TWO nights later, when Hacklette's car and Hacklette and the snow white speck had returned across the desert to the Great Stack, the Yaquis made a terrific attack on Hacklette's mine. Unseen in the dark, they had circled up the ravine above the mine buildings, and opened fire. It was totally unexpected. Terrified peons came tumbling out of the bunk house and cowered in the stone office building, until their American foremen thrust Winchesters into their hands and drove them to the stockade. The Mexican guards, being cursed steadily by the superintendent, fumbled for loopholes and pumped away at random. The shift then down in the mine could not be herded to the cage. They scuttled like rats to the farthermost workings, and huddled there, waiting to be killed. In the cañon a half dozen men guarding some loaded ore cars tried to escape toward the desert, but Yaquis firing from the cliff above turned them, and they hunted for cover in the stockade.

"Queer the —— —— —— don't charge," muttered the superintendent. Nobody had been hit. But the battle spluttered like a caldron for hours.

On the brink of the chasm, at the *barranca's* edge directly over the true *Veta Negra*, a man stood in the dark-

ness, and his figure, lone, lost in the night, was itself as a creature, or a prince, of darkness. He had paused for a moment in certain silent toil, and stood there on the wild eminence, head sunken to his chest, a grave spectator of the crackling, spitfire little inferno over in the ravine. For he had created it. Like a calm engineer with thumb on a talismanic button to destroy a fleet, or inundate a domain, or set grinding the mills of the gods, he was the master. The terrific force of nature that he had harnessed to his desire was human passion, and across there the night and the sierra were in labour to bring forth his hidden purpose.

Here was a knife slash at the very antennæ of the republic's power. A railroad was threatened, a mine was attacked, and both were of foreign capital. The spitfire would echo next day on the bourses of the world. Points would crumble off the apex of Mexican securities. Then there was the sequent colic of the president down at the capital. To throw good money, not to mention lives, after once good money, not to mention lives, and bring this disastrous brawl to an end — perhaps? Or to ask the brawlers what they wanted?

But this was not the purpose, not altogether the purpose, of the man on the chasm's brink. It was much nearer. A rope dangled before his eyes and on down into the black abyss. Though his outstretched hand grasped the rope, the night was so thick that he could not see it. The certain silent toil was all by feel. The rope grew taut, and strained faintly outward against his grip. At this the man hurried back from the cliff's edge, and came again to the rope, here slanting to the ground.

He laid his hands on it, and fifty other hands behind him tightened on it, and a line of dark forms in the darkness behind him pulled backward steadily, swiftly, as though playing at a tug of war. A pulley creaked dully somewhere in air.

A dark bulk, dangling at the rope's end and as inert as a corpse, rose slowly out of the black cañon to the edge. The man ran to receive it. With a long hook he caught the rope, and by a giant's strength pulled the massive bundle toward him. As it grazed the edge, he whistled. The rope slacked, and the thing descended again, while the man guided it with his hook around the rope. The bundle went down through the top of the pepper tree, whose branches had been partly cut away, and thence into the crevice between the cliff and the upstanding ledge. Naked arms reached for it, and eased it to earth in the mouth of the mine tunnel. The rope net enclosing it was flung open, and piecemeal the cargo was borne into the tunnel. Each piece was a sack of ore. It had come from the ore cars in the gorge below, which was Hacklette's ore out of the spurious *Veta Negra*, awaiting shipment. The attack on the mine stockade enabled the silent toilers to do this.

Yet the drama of forty — or four hundred — thieves, like the spluttering caldron, was but an essential to the man's purpose, and not yet the purpose itself. When the rope was unhooked from the bundle, it was instantly hooked into a similar bundle, made up and waiting, and the stealthy, block-and-tackle, cargo-shifting process was reversed. The outgoing bundle was sacked ore

also, but the ore in the sacks was from the true *Veta Negra*. Therefore each outgoing sack carried one hundred ounces of silver as against eight or nine ounces in each incoming sack.

At the bottom of the cañon, when the burdened rope deposited its weight, there was another interchange of bundles. Naked, perspiring, powerful forms came and went, each staggering under a heavy sack. They constantly varied their path over the gravelly cañon bed, so that no marked sprinkling of ore could later betray their operations. To make doubly sure, each sack during its voyage was wrapped in a *serape*. Finally, when the attack on the stockade had dropped off to fitful outbursts, the ore cars in the gorge, three of them, lay deserted and loaded as originally, four hundred sacks to the car; except — that each sack now held one hundred ounces of silver instead of eight or nine ounces.

To return to the man's purpose. The man was not certain of that purpose himself. Now that it was all over, even to the removal of the block-and-tackle scaffolding, he stood again on the cliff and wondered what he had really meant. He grappled deep in unfamiliar reaches of thought, or of his soul, and believed at last that he knew why he had done this thing. But after a little he doubted if that were the answer after all, and he searched farther and deeper, and paused, for surely he had it now! The revelation wrought in him a startled sense of amazement, yet — no, he must grope deeper yet.

At first he said: "It's so he can pay Maisie back. A

few more such shipments —— " For quite a time that seemed to be the answer; *seemed* to be.

Then, he said: "It's restitution. My soul is sick of its own vileness. 'An eye for an eye.' Perhaps restitution will heal. Of course I still hate Hacklette" — he paused, doubting, for he must get this thing straightened out.

At last he murmured: "The poor old bloated, futile peacock. I got him into it, and I'll have to pull him out." He was dismayed at the discovery. But he smiled whimsically, feeling better. There was no further need to grope and delve. This was rock bottom. This was the purpose.

As, deeply at peace, he turned now from the cliff, the last of the toilers there, a panther-like body flung itself upon him, and struck, struck, with serpent quickness. He reeled, trying to fend off the steel, but he caught at her, held her. He knew at once who it was.

"Coyote wants you," he said, gasping. "He wants his boy. He has been searching —— "

"While you rob his — my — boy!" She struggled against him to strike again. "You steal the secret. I follow you. I carry my boy, my little chief. He is sick, and I stop — days — weeks. And here — you have the secret. You steal the silver. You haul it away on the white men's cars. — *Hunh*, good, you are dying now!"

The world was still, except for these two. The last ember of the battle over in the ravine was cold.

"Coyote!" cried the wounded man, peering into the darkness as he sank to the ground. "Quick, here's your wife, Coyote!"

CHAPTER NINE

A Boom in Buttons

MIKE ELDRIDGE, the smelter's assayer, glared at the tiny silver button — to his eyes it was a croquet ball — that he had just taken from a cupel. Muttering as though whiskey were in his brain he peered into the other salt-cellar like cups. They were on a tray, and the bone ash was yet glowing from the white heat of his furnace. He squinted incredulously at the seeming drop of quicksilver nested in each, for each button was a bullet, a pebble, a ——

"*Bowlders!*" ejaculated Mike. "If they think this here assay shop is a quarry, why —— "

He scraped back his chair, and strode out in long-legged perturbation down to his friend, the foreman of the sampling mill. But Mike was circumspect. "Driblets," he said to the foreman, "I fumbled my pulp on that last *Veta Negra* lot, dropped it on the floor, salted it with last year's deposit of cigarette ashes. Wish you'd snatch another sample for me, and not think to mention it to the Old Man."

Eldridge watched this resampling himself, from ore bins to bucking board. The mine's representative had not been advised, and was nowhere near. Eldridge left with a new pulp sacked by his own hand. There

could be no unchastity about this sample. A day later he drew a second tray of cupels from his incandescent muffle, laying it on the table beside his scales. Again he lifted out a button, brushed off the litharge crust, and gazed. This time he gazed with a cumulative thoughtfulness. The glistening bead was pure silver carrying gold. It was the silver and gold in an assay-ton of ore, and proportionate representative of the gold and silver in an actual ton. But, as Eldridge conservatively protested, there would be so much silver and gold, and so darned little ore. Resignedly he caught up the button in his tweezers, to lay it on the balance, a delicate, glass-encased balance that could weigh a signature to the last dot of an i. Then he rebelled.

"What this shop needs," he sobbed wrathfully, "is a platform scales and a derrick. When they want a coal heaver on this job —— "

He moved to a coarser balance and weighed the button. He weighed the button in each of the other cupels, and struck an average. "Before they grow up into meteorites," he grumbled — "twenty-four hundred and one ounces, *wow!*" With acid he consumed the silver in each button, weighed the gold remaining, and again struck an average. "An ounce of gold, leaving just about twenty-four hundred ounces of silver in each ton of this man's ore — there, there, Mike, steady now. You know you never did believe in real money, anyhow. It's something that ain't so, and don't you go to getting superstitious ——"

A footfall was heard in the office. The assayer shot a look over his shoulder. Mike was uncircumspect only in soliloquy. He nodded, and went on figuring out his

report on this sensational ore lot. It made him feel like a romancer, and he was shamed and peevish.

"My determinations ready?" spoke the intruder.

Eldridge shivered. The man's voice always set him on edge. "When they are," he said, "they go to the office."

"No matter, I'm in a hurry for my settlement sheet, and you've had two days to assay that last lot. When —— "

"Seems to me," said Eldridge to himself in a conversational pitch, "that some shippers feel awful sure sometimes that nobody's going to call for an umpire assay."

"Call for an umpire?" exclaimed the intruder. "Look here, you, if you're hinting —— "

Eldridge flung down his pencil, and swung in his chair like a locomotive on a turntable. But the Irish in his eye did not get to his tongue. A first glance at the man changed all that.

"By the way, Hacklette," he asked casually, "what did *you* people find?"

"Find? When? What?"

Eldridge was convinced. "Lord, Lord," he moaned in his breast, "the man don't know *what's* in his ore — yet! For the love of Mike, Mike dear, now be careful!"

"In that last lot," demanded Hacklette, "that what you mean?" He was beginning to take alarm. His ore had showed a falling off in richness lately. As a check on the smelter, it was sampled and assayed at the mine, and made to run as high as possible by means of a slow furnace. On this last lot he had as yet only the mine's assay from the mine's sample, for Eldridge had thoughtfully delayed sending the smelter's pulp to the mine for

assay. Consequently, the smelter's assay was of Krag's ore from the true *Vetra Negra*, and Hacklette's assay was of the spurious *Vetra Negra* ore, three cars of it, which had never reached the smelter, thanks to Krag and his Yaquis. Hence any remark about an umpire assay was disturbing. Had Eldridge, in that last lot, found a startling drop-off in the ore? Did Eldridge think that he, Hacklette, would demand an umpire in order to be convinced? The least suggestion that his bonanza might be petering out made Hacklette intolerably snappish. It was his first mine, and he had not realized yet that they never do feed from the hand, and that never, never, can they be trained to do the same trick *ad infinitum*.

Mike Eldridge, however, not only knew the ways of mines, but the ways of the men who owned mines. And this one was snappish. He had seen that in that first glance.

"Yep," said Eldridge, "in that last lot, that's what I mean. Was just wondering, that's all, if your assayer was bothered as much to find something in it as . . . By the way, what's *V. N.* quoted at these days, anyhow?"

"It's not quoted," Hacklette stiffly retorted. But he was suffering. So people were guessing already that he might want to sell! "No sir," he asserted indignantly, "it's not on the market. Not a share, sir."

"I wasn't thinking of a share," said Mike, talking sociably as he worked on the sensational report. "You see, some of us poor brow-sweaters around these works could pool enough for a perfectly whole *vara*. When a thing slumps, drops to our reach—a low-grade proposition, say — why, then we're the easy marks. We're a

regular philanthropic institution, easy as charity. About the *V. N.* — from the last few shipments I judge it ought to be waxing some less haughty and exclusive. . . . Still," said Mike, rambling, forgetting about it, "as you say, maybe we *had* better save our money."

But Mr. Hacklette would not play the game. One cannot do horse-trading with an arrogant tyro who does not know a spavin when it is pointed out to him. Mike Eldridge pointed out spavins for a half hour, and only insulted Mr. Hacklette the more. It was like bidding for a man's game leg. As Mike reflected that he could not throttle Mr. Hacklette, or anything of that sort, he woefully gathered up his papers, and dragged his steps over to the office. But he went to the Old Man himself, general manager and vice-president, and saw that the door was closed and that they were alone. Without a word he handed over the report, and waited for the explosion.

The Old Man's eyes bulged for an instant, and then he said: "I'd advise a good night's sleep, Mike."

But this time Mike would stand for no impeachment of his sobriety. He mentioned the resample. Everything checked. One might suppose that the Old Man was beginning to look frightened. It was, though, only *mixed feelings;* a phenomenon common enough in all mining camps when word passes that some one else has struck a rich lead. The Old Man was mentally wording a telegram to the company's president in New York. Eldridge interrupted. "There's something else," he mused aloud, "that might combine with that report to — advantage."

The general manager looked at him steadily. Eldridge shook his head.

"You're hired here as assayer," the Old Man began.

"And," said Eldridge, "you've got there all I can give you as assayer. But I'm not hired as a psychologist."

"Oh come, Mike, what's the tip?"

"The word being longer, the fee comes fancy. I'll want ten shares, when you buy the *Veta Negra.*"

"You whiskey sponge," cried the Old Man, "how did you get it into your fevered brain that we were wanting to buy —— "

"That," said Eldridge, "is a specimen gratis of expert psychology. Do I get the ten shares?"

"Mike, you do, if it helps us to buy."

"Then here's your parcel, neatly wrapped up, tied with baby ribbon — to wit: Hacklette don't know yet that this last lot is any different from the rest."

The Old Man jumped to his feet. "And you stand there with a bonanza like that under your tongue, and don't spit it out! Where's this fellow? You didn't let him get away?"

"He's hanging around. I told him maybe you'd hurry up his settlement sheet."

"Then hustle him right in. — No, you psychologist, let's not be abrupt. He'll ask for me, and you tell him you guess I'll be disengaged in seven or eleven minutes."

Two hours later Mr. Hacklette came out of the general manager's office fraught with emotion. He had just been offered a half, three quarters, then one cold, flat million for his mine and railroad. For the first time in

his life Mr. Hacklette had had a chance to refuse a million dollars, and he had refused it.

As for the general manager, in his turn he had found it impracticable to throttle Mr. Hacklette, and on the other hand he had bid as high as he dared on his own responsibility. The instant his door closed behind Mr. Hacklette, he dived into his code book and began digging therefrom a long message to the company's president. Their own engineers, he reminded the president, had already reported favourably on the mine, on the strength of which the company had not only loaned Hacklette money for development work, but had tried to buy it for seven hundred and fifty thousand dollars. A further examination of the property now was unadvisable, since it would only give Hacklette time to estimate the real value of his bonanza, beside arousing competitors. He concluded by asking the company to specify a limit.

Having sent the telegram, the Old Man trotted out and down to the sampling mill. He ordered another resample of the last *Veta Negra* lot, and himself replaced the foreman while it was being done. Personally, also, he made the assays. Mike was right. Everything checked. By that time came a reply from New York, The president specified two millions. But Hacklette was gone.

The Old Man was disgusted. Hacklette had ordered out an engine, had hitched it to his car, had approximated express speed and twenty wrecks to get to his mine. However, he came back the next day, and stalked across the Old Man's path. Or the Old Man trotted across Hacklette's path. At any rate, the Old Man aggressively

advanced to a million three hundred thousand for mine and railroad, and thereupon aggressively stopped short. And Hacklette accepted, inwardly trembling and gulping hard. The Old Man was self-congratulatory. He believed he had dazzled Hacklette with certified checks, thoughtfully drawn in advance. Hacklette also was self-congratulatory. For out at the mine they had just broken into the lair of the geological monstrosity.

Hacklette would have returned immediately to the States, except for one thing. There was a ghost to lay. To lay the ghost a certain receipt for moneys paid must be left on a certain rock. Hacklette still wanted very much to comply. True, he had no mine now to be attacked by Yaquis, yet his dread of his resourceful son-in-law stayed with him. It was rather greater. For if Krag heard of the sale of the mine, he might hasten to reveal himself and demand the sum due Maisie. He could even blackmail him, with threats of criminal prosecution, for a much greater amount. Beside which, Hacklette had his own private reasons, inclusive of his daughter's opinion of her father, for keeping Krag and Maisie apart by any means whatever. To reimburse Maisie rather than Krag had its advantages, since he could always wheedle the money out of her again. Providentially, he had brought Maisie with him on this trip. He could give her his check, and get her receipt at once. He would account for the absence of Chubbuck's signature by a note to the effect that Chubbuck was in the States and could not be reached conveniently. But to place

the receipt on the certain rock; it was that which troubled Mr. Hacklette.

In his heart, for all his suspicious nature, the man trusted to Krag's word. Otherwise, he would not have thought twice about a receipt which was to bind Krag, on his promise alone, never to let Maisie know that he was alive. And yet, there was human nature. What of human nature, when one man keeps another man from his own child? What, in human nature, will that second man do, given the chance? Hacklette saw again the look on Krag's face as he gazed down into the cañon, and frankly he shuddered.

Then again, suppose Krag could not restrain the Yaquis. They might hold him, Hacklette, for a ransom. They might kill him outright. No, he could not go alone. He thought of a body-guard. But that was more perilous. It was breaking the compact. It relieved Krag of his word. An armed force would tempt the Yaquis to a wholesale instead of a single killing.

Finally he thought of Maisie. Yes, Maisie should go with him. If it came to endangering Maisie, Krag would certainly control his Yaquis, would certainly spend his own life doing it. And Hacklette meant to keep close to Maisie. With Maisie, too, he did not fear capture, since Krag, being certain that Maisie was married again, would not reveal himself to her, as he might have to do in case he permitted the Yaquis to capture her.

Assuredly there was no other way, and this way Hacklette at once put into execution. He gave Maisie his check for two hundred and thirty thousand dollars, forgetting interest, and said playfully that he must have

her receipt. "Just sign it 'Maisie,' " he said. Next he offered her one last chance to see the *Barranca Quebrante*. He had to go out there once more, he said, to turn over the property to the smelter people. "You've never come yet," he reminded her.

She shook her head, smiling, while tear-dimmed eyes pleaded to be let off. The last trip together, Jim's and her's, had been up there in that cañon. And it was up there where Jim had been killed.

"Your last chance," urged her father. "Afterward, you know, we start for the States, and it's good-bye Mexico for good."

"I'll go, father," she said suddenly.

She could never be so poignantly reminded of Jim again, and, since she was never more to have the chance, she found that she yearned for the sharp, sweet pain of it.

CHAPTER TEN

Naming a Celestial Villa

WHEN Krag saw that he could not hold Dolores, as he wanted to do for Coyote's sake, nor even defend himself longer from her stinging poinard, he called out. The cry was not consciously a ruse, yet was a ruse nevertheless. His senses told him that there was no help in the darkness, but some desperate cunning of the life instinct made him cry out before he knew. The same instinct made him use Coyote's name. The murderess remembered her young. Lest Coyote take her and so find the boy, she ran. She came to where she had hidden the child, and paused only long enough to wrap him to her breast in her *rebosa.*

The padded footfalls died away, and Krag half lay on the ground. Something — a sensation of reeling — made him think of the snowy white of a hospital cot, and the restfulness of it, and made him long to close his eyes and shift to others the burden of doing what could be done to save his life. He was surely drooping to earth as into his bed. "Wait, though," he said, putting out a hand to support himself. "I am the doctor, too. Unprofessional to — forget." And it was the physician, wearily taking up again his old fight with mortality, and not the man thinking of his own life, who with one hand and his

teeth bound a handkerchief around his arm, above a deep knife wound. "I hope that's the — worst one," he murmured, "and that the others can — wait until . . . Besides I am — tired." He let his head sink then, with the fading away of his senses.

As Dolores ran with her child, the flying end of her *rebosa* brushed against an organ cactus and a frazzled thread was caught and held in the thorns. The next morning a war party of Yaquis, returning from the feigned attack on Hacklette's mine, dragged her from where she crouched in a lump of chaparral.

"You know me," she cried to them quickly, "I am Cajemi's daughter."

Some of the warriors could remember Cajemi's sleek daughter in the draggled woman, and this saved her from a spy's instant fate.

"The tribe has missed you," said their leader, "and the chief has had every eye watch for you." But when they saw that she carried a child, they were at a loss to understand.

"You are Chagre, I think," she said. She was already plotting escape. "Where then is Tetibite?"

The petty chieftain told her that Tetibite had departed for Cocorito, a deserted pueblo on the new military highway. He had gone to hear a peace offer from the Mexican general. "But," Chagre added, "the meeting place will be safely ambushed. The Lone Oak thought of that. Let the *pelones* do more than their peace talk, and ——"

"Peace?" repeated Dolores. "Chagre, you lie. The Yaquis do not forget how Cajemi died!"

The warriors looked at one another guiltily. The vehemence of her scorn made them ashamed.

"We cannot always fight," Chagre urged. "Even Tetibite, after many days' talk with the Lone Oak ——"

"The Lone Oak, the Lone Oak!" Her dark, blinking eyes opened on them. "Truly the Yaquis are the Lone Oak's peons. If not, who loads the cars of the iron road for him?"

"Why not?" demanded the chieftain, rousing to anger, and the tawny braves around him muttered assent. "Why not? The Lone Oak saves our tribe. The Lone Oak's mine wins our battles."

"His mine?" she cried. "*Hunh*, you do not know, then. You do not know that the mine is your own mine. You do not know that you rob your own *Veta Negra* for him. *Ay, ay*, friends, the *Veta Negra!*"

Their faces grew dark and evil. No, they did not know; and she laughed at them bitterly, mocked them for simple children. The tribe's secrets, so long preserved from chief to chief, had become as inviolate to the Yaqui mind as sanctity itself, and the name of the *Veta Negra*, most fabulous of the hidden treasure houses, was as the lustre of a shrine. Blinking at them always out of her sleepy eyes, Dolores denounced this white man, this Lone Oak, for he had come seeking their buried mines, and at last he had stolen from her the secret of the *Veta Negra*, while pretending to cure her babe of the *calentura*. Might they not now understand why the Lone Oak wanted peace? She broke again into her gurgling laugh. Why, if not to work his stolen mine in quiet? He could not long smuggle his ore into the cars of

his wife's father before the Mexicans found him out. He must sell the Yaquis into the bondage of peace, and so buy his own peace to enjoy the Yaquis' treasure hoards.

What the dangerous woman saw then in their faces killed her desire of escape. The chief's absence from his tribe gave her a chance for deadlier artistry.

"We are not children," spoke Chagre. "Yet are we only warriors. The Lone Oak has truly saved the tribe, but if it was to rob us, then must our elders in their wisdom say how to pay him off both as saviour and thief. Now I seem to know why he talked with the *Americano*, who is the father of his wife, for did they not need to plan the loading of the *Americano's* cars with the stolen Yaqui ore? And we, fools for one long night, laboured as they had planned. But the man, who is the wife's father, is to come again. We are to watch, says the Lone Oak, and keep harm from the man, and bring to the Lone Oak the paper that the man will leave on a rock. We are not always fools, Dolores, for we will bring the paper to the elders. It may have to do with the pay at the Great Stack for this treasure which they have stolen."

"Bring the man, too!" she said. "Bring him, since he likes walking in the Yaqui country, so we may cut off the soles of his feet. And as for the Lone Oak, you may find him with his reward already." From her *rebosa*, sheathed in leather next her warm burden, she drew her knife and showed them the blade. "I left him at his mine," she said. "But go. Make sure."

Chagre with ten of the warriors returned and found Krag ying on his back, with his eyes open. Eyes and eyelids

were all that had power of motion; the soul yet kept its windows open, and peered out musingly. He looked up at the softest of blue skies. His senses were softened in the sweet blessedness of rest. In the deep blue he seemed to read one word written against him. But he contemplated it with eyes serene and a peaceful smile. The word stood for the crime he had most loathed, which had made him despise his species. Now he saw it written against himself — Futility!

He had been as relentless as Fate, as remorseless as stone. He had given years, diabolic calculation, a patience unmatched in hell. And he lay here defeated, and yet by no failure in calculation, by no unvanquished circumstance, by no thing of flesh, by no fear of God. He lay here defeated by a spark of simple decency in his own heart, which for all his incarnate cunning he had not foreseen. The structure of his villainy was ashes. From the burning had come the murderess with her knife — Futility! But he saw that it was the name of his mansion in the skies, and he believed that he was going home.

When the Yaquis came so that they could look down on his face, they saw the calm, white peace on his brow, and he smiled up at them. After all, judgment was matter for the elders, they thought, for they were troubled within themselves as they met the kind gray eyes. They were simple warriors, and it should be as though they had come upon a wounded friend.

To each chieftain, and as many others as he could, Krag had taught such first aid measures as were possible in the field, especially the staunching of wounds and

aseptic dressings; and now Chagre, with awkward diffidence because of the eyes of the master, recited those lessons by performance.

For two days Krag lay, not moving, the mountain under him, the sky above, with eleven Indians for nurses. Then, on a litter of boughs and thongs, they bore him by easy stages across the sierra, to his own hut in the distant village of Chihuitl. The elders, and many of the tribe, prodded by the insidious barb of a woman's tongue, were gathered there already. Chagre and his ten braves kept them from the litter, but the wounded man felt menace and static hate in the air.

CHAPTER ELEVEN

Maisie

SHE stood on the eerie crest of the *barranca*, as Krag had so often done, and gazed over into the ravine opposite, scarred now by the ugly mine buildings, and far down to the edge of the mountain brook, where they had camped that last time so long ago. The narrow beach was obliterated by railroad tracks and freight cars and smutty ore siftings. All the past was smeared over by a mean present.

Five years had put a ripening plumpness on Maisie, and as she stood wind-blown, high above the wild cañon, she was still a pleasing, girlish figure, though seemingly a bit of another girl, a rounded, rosy cheeked, Highland lass sort of a girl, just turned a woman. But a gravity seemed to hallow the once joyous, vibrant being. The gravity was about the mouth that used to smile and laugh in shy eagerness to be on happy terms with every living creature, and one was smitten with tenderness now because of the bright red lips that smiled very sweetly, very bravely. The big blue eyes were grave, too, and deep in them was a settled sorrow, grown there from keenest pain that changed with the years to wistfulness. The long lashes were moist as she tried to decide exactly where it was that Jim had put up her tent that day.

She believed she had come to realize the loneliness of her husband's heart, and the pathos of it was the more awful because she alone might have filled that yearning, and yet did not. Her love was not then informed with the understanding that thinking of him, always thinking of him, had since brought to her.

Her abstraction gave her father the opportunity, while her back was turned, to place the receipt on the designated rock, and cover it with a stone.

"That scenery ain't so interesting, is it, May?" he said, though not without a constraint that might have passed for gentleness. "Come, let's be getting back." A sensitiveness about his spine kept him aware of unseen eyes, perhaps of levelled rifles.

"Yes, father," said Maisie, turning. "You must be hungry, and just to give me this walk too."

* * * * *

It was as though a torpid peon, no more to be noticed than a lizard, were sunning himself on the cathedral steps in the plaza. In Mexican towns there were always torpid peons. One did not speak to them, unless to have an errand done. If the peon spoke, it was subserviently, with bared head. He could be dismissed with a gesture, a *centavo*, or nothing at all. The seeming peon in tattered *manta* so stamped the mountain wilderness with the local colour of a Mexican town that Hacklette forgot for the instant that he was alone with Maisie in the sierras. Hacklette frowned, to let the native know that any begging was useless. The man detached himself as a chameleon from the gray rock where he was lying, and stood in their path.

"He say you come 'long." The native spoke in apologetic English, yet with naïve pride in his English.

Hacklette did not feel the weight of the truth. He shook his head curtly. He was not to be bothered. But Maisie in a pang of yearning thought of Alice, her precious darling, left behind with the smelter ladies.

The native involuntarily put a hand to his sombrero brim. "Plees *señor*, come 'long."

And this was capture by Indians! Hacklette realized it from his daughter's white face.

Other *manta* and leather-clad figures gathered near. They, too, might have been peons, because of their meek and insignificant garb, but their skin was clearer, more copper than brown, and their black eyes were quick and intelligent, and they were taller, and deep chested, of seasoned, magnificent physique. Yet, try as he might, Hacklette could see only peons. Because no brandished weapon gave him thought for his life, he thought of his outraged dignity. But the first protest on his lips died there. It would not do to invoke Krag's name, and Maisie there to hear. Then the dumfounding conviction came that Krag had ordered this.

Maisie touched his arm. "We must go with them," she said. "They are Yaquis. And father," she whispered, her lips tense and white, "when you have the chance, give me your pistol."

As if answering the despair in her thought, one of the braves drew near, passed his hands over her indignant father, and brought from his hip pocket the short barrelled revolver concealed there. Yet, instead of keeping it, he handed the weapon to Maisie, and motioned to

the Yaqui who spoke a little English. The latter was a *pacífico* who when a boy had taken service as house *mozo* with an American family of Hermosillo, and since had worked mostly under Gringo bosses. He was now Coyote's runner and spy between the sierras and the Great Stack.

"Tell her, Fesco," said the brave to the interpreter, "she must come too, and we are sorry. Tell her the wounded Yaqui she helped one time is Chief Tetibite now, and to be not afraid, and with the *pistola* to kill the first Yaqui who comes near her." And Fesco told her, while Hacklette hung on his words, dreading to hear the name of Kr g.

"An' *manaña,*" added Fesco of his own accord, "there is one *mula.* The *señorita* ride him." Krag's mule it was, left at the goatherd's hut.

At the goatherd's, too, when they came there, Maisie found one of her own sex, a mother likewise, waiting for them. More like a great bedraggled cat, with blinking eyes whose pupils grew luminous and exultant as she saw Maisie, was the woman crouching in wait there. Maisie was so glad to see a woman at all that at first she had no feeling of real peril in this woman's malignant triumph.

The woman sat sluggishly in the hut's door-way, and a two-year-old boy, naked, lean, of silken coppery skin, played about her. She did not rise when she saw there were two captives instead of one, but as they plodded wearily nearer, the Yaquis behind, her dilating pupils did the part of eager greeting.

"You the *Americano's* daughter?" she demanded in

broken Spanish, avidly making sure first of Maisie's identity.

Maisie, on the arm of her frowning, travel-stained father, had stopped before the door to look at the child. The sight was vaguely comforting. Where there were little children, there must be heart strings attuned to humanity, she thought.

Nodding to reply that she was indeed the *Americano's* daughter — in other words, the pale-faced girl for whom the Lone Oak twisted the nose of the daughter of a chief, for whom Chief Tetibite on occasion was as stone against his tribe — nodding unsuspectingly to all this, Maisie stooped and cupped a soft palm under the baby boy's chin. The little fellow looked at her, wonder-eyed; then imperiously gripped her sleeve, to be taken up.

"Thou, too, rat!" cried the mother, snatching the child and bringing him a box on the head. Maisie recoiled before the malevolence of the look darted on herself.

Hacklette listened uneasily as the Yaqui woman flayed Maisie in her Spanish jargon. He understood nothing, but when have two women ever met who did not contrive speech? And Maisie had not forgotten her Spanish. Hacklette listened for that which might sound like Krag's name. One need was uppermost in his flurried state, and this was to bring Maisie through their adventure ignorant of Krag's existence. He gave agonized attention to the Yaqui woman's strange rage, yet made naught of the gurgling menace that rasped at times into a curdling snarl. Then he began to wonder at the rage itself, and to ask himself the why of it, for

surely the two had never met before. A denser intelligence than Hacklette's would have known. The woman was jealous. Hacklette guessed that there was a man. What man? Inspiration flashed on him then. He recalled his own scornful jibe at Krag. So it was true! And this was the woman. Surely, surely! *And the child?*

At the moment the child slipped from his mother's fingers, and ran and clung again to Maisie's skirts, while Maisie rested her hand on his head. This time it was Hacklette, with a look of sickened horror, who tore the child away, as though he were unclean and Maisie were defiled by his touch.

"Father!" Maisie cried in protest.

Hacklette seized her arm. "Come away from it," he muttered gruffly. "Come here, into the hut — Now then, what was that woman saying to you?"

"Poor thing," sighed Maisie, "it's only because she can't bear the sight of an honest woman. Of course it hurt her because her boy seemed to turn from her to me, though I suppose this pretty dress — pretty now, isn't it? — caught his eye, or my gold belt buckle, or something or other."

"What did she say? Who is the ——"

"Why, you saw her; she was raving, that's all. Even a poor Indian girl may be crazed by shame. And she did try to kill him, she said, but now he is getting well, and of course that makes her, being an Indian, so much more bitter. . . . Why father, you look ——"

"Killed?" he repeated. "Almost killed? Who did she almost kill?"

"Why, the man," said Maisie a little impatiently. "We don't know any Yaquis, so what difference can it make?"

"No, oh, no — no, of course not."

"Yet she told me his name, too."

"What?"

"Yes, and I remember it because somehow it pictured to me a desolate, tragic, storm-swept figure; the dim outline of a man, of course. These Indians" — she sighed again. "How we should pity ourselves when nature utters her poetry by the unconscious tongues of her own children. The Lone Oak, father, that's the name. *The Lone Oak.* Oh," she cried in wistful exasperation, "you would be so much better company, father, if you had the — the *heart* — to see things!"

Hacklette was seeing so well with his intellect that his tongue was leaden. His relief was overpowering, for he saw that the Lone Oak was Krag's Indian name, and Mr. Hacklette blessed Indian poesy for that cloak. Also he saw a by-path, though a loathsome one, out of the slough. For if Maisie *should* learn that Krag lived, then Krag, revealed to her as the Lone Oak, would be worse than dead through the damning horror of a squaw's claim. But, in quick, unfamiliar pity for his daughter, Hacklette hoped to evade a recourse so disgusting.

"Listen to me," he commanded, "I want you to keep away from her and — from that brat of hers."

"But she is going with us, father," Maisie protested. "They — the old men of the tribe — are going to hold some kind of trial, and she says they will give the man — the Lone Oak — a chance to right the wrong done her, or —

or —" Maisie shuddered, and her father, to his credit, shuddered also.

But the Hacklette intellect was soon at work again. Why, he asked himself, had not the Yaqui woman revealed the identity of the Lone Oak to Maisie? Hacklette took hope. The woman's purposes, like his own, required that Krag and Maisie should not meet. Hacklette believed he knew why. That hideous star chamber of old men would be less likely to prevail on Krag to take the Yaqui woman if Krag knew that Maisie were near.

Hacklette had found an ally, he ruefully thought, in this squaw. But what vengeance, he asked himself again and again, did the woman in her tigerish hate intend for Maisie?

CHAPTER TWELVE

"Artless Persuasion"

EACH, with his *serape* under him, as a sheik of Arabia would have his rug, the old men sat in council, sombre and cross-legged, under the hadow of the peaks. During three mornings and two afternoons they had sat, but stopped always to go to the oil pots, before the voracious young braves should fish out the larger bits of goat flesh or wild goose. No doubts afflicted them as to the guilt of the Lone Oak. It was the punishment that taxed their wisdom. For punishment must be tinctured with reward. And to lash a man with a laurel wreath was difficult. Solomon, Daniel, and all the sachems were never so beset.

Treachery alone was simple. Gratitude was not quite so simple, yet simple. But to take life for the one and show the other, that was complex, because a dead man lies cold to thanks, and the Yaquis knew nothing of monuments and statuary.

Accordingly the old men would not cut off the soles of Krag's feet, and gouge out his eyes, and pad his hands and knees in leather, and leave him thus in the desert, an untethered burro near him, laden with tortillas and a filled water jar, and a tinkling bell around its neck.

They would not, because when the victim drags himself near the tinkling bell, the beast edges off to crop tumbleweeds elsewhere, and when the beast dies, the tinkling of the bell dies also, even though the victim still lives to listen for it. Yet that was good for simple treachery.

Nor would the old men give Krag the *Veta Negra* for saving the tribe, because that would enrich him who had sought peace with their foes to possess the stolen mine. Yet that was none too good in simple gratitude.

Then came great Cajemi's daughter of the serpent tongue. She came, her full breast heaving from the cruel climb up the mountain, her arms trembling under the weight of her child. She had come painfully, partly by night as well as day, while the two white captives behind her slept. Her *guaraches*, or cowhide sandals, were rotting from her feet, as wandering by stealth and consuming hate had worked their ravages on her. But she had bathed in the pool of a cascade, and she had washed her poor, scarlet-striped petticoats and white chemise, and her black hair, streaming and wind dried, hung luxuriantly over her shoulders. Passion's greed, too, was reawakening in the smouldering jet of her eyes, so that somewhat of the old opulence of her sleek, barbaric beauty was come back on her. She had dipped the child as well in the cold, blue waters of the pool, and when she set him down in the commons of the village, his soft, satin skin gave back a sunbeam slanting off the peak in the living tints of flame playing on burnished copper.

She stood blinking for a time over the circle of shaggy gray heads. She looked first for the Lone Oak, a quick-

ening in her sleepy eyes, a tinge of rust under the bright, tawny skin. The Lone Oak was not before the council. She saw him nowhere in the village out of doors, certainly not among the women squatted round the steaming pots, nor among the idling warriors or playing children. Her half-closed eyes rested on his hut, where Chagre sat in the door-way. She had a cat-like curiosity to know how deeply her claws had sunk. The Oak, then, for all his great, silent strength, lay prostrate.

The old men were aware that she was there. They hoped she brought that which might help them in their quandary, but they gave her no heed until she spoke. When she did, it was with a virago's scorn. Why were they so long? Was it more proof they wanted?

The elder of San Marcial shook his head. This elder and all his village had been driven long since from their Rio Matape homes by the Mexicans. No, they needed no more proof, said the elder with chiding gravity. The Lone Oak had told them all, and enough was as Dolores had charged against him. At points there was conflict, yes, but the Lone Oak would not name the only one who might say his words were true.

This was Chief Tetibite that Krag would not name, for Krag understood that the chief himself had much to answer for, when he should return from his supposedly traitorous pow-wow with the Mexicans. Krag would not imperil further his friend and accomplice. Yet he had told them that the mine was indeed the *Veta Negra.* He told them how he had found it, by meddling where meddling was sacrilege, by meddling in the

secrets of treasure which the tribe had guarded as its life and salvation from the days of the Spaniard.

"And he told you," asked Dolores, "that he stole —— "

"Of the mine's silver, of the Yaqui war funds?" The elder shrugged his shoulders, for did they need to hear that from the Lone Oak, when forty warriors had carried the sacked ore for him?

"But how much?" persisted Dolores in her gurgling whine. "He told you how much he stole?— *Hunh*, look!"— She flung Maisie's receipt, like a bone, into the circle. "See on the paper, the money that is written there."

An elder, priest educated, told off the numerals, one by one: a 2, a 3, and four naughts. He told them off one by one because he could not formulate the sum they stood for. That was beyond arithmetic. But they pondered it ruefully, like decrepit old men robbed of a precious hoard. They could, at least, think in terms of things that cost untold sums, of belching cannon to kill one hundred Mexicans at a loading, of impregnable fortresses cresting their mountain heights, of uniformed ranks and epaulettes. These the Lone Oak had stolen.

"'Twas paid to the woman that was his wife," said Dolores, her voice purring voluptuously. "Ay, there is her name. Ask Fesco when he comes. Ask the woman herself, and her father who is the *Americano*, for they also are coming. Ask yourselves, if she does not keep the money for the Lone Oak until he goes back to her. Ask yourselves, and you will say that the Lone Oak waits among us only until the *Veta Negra* is his own by the peace which he sends Tetibite to beg of the Mexicans.

Ask yourselves, for you need too much of woman's help, my simple fathers. Or if I must, I will tell you this: hasten your work on the Lone Oak, before our splendid chief brings a Mexican army to Chihuitl. *Oo-ee*, you do not know Tetibite has gone to the capital! Ay, it is true. He went from Cocorito to Mexico City. As guest or prisoner, no matter; either is the tribe's shame. O my fathers, have done, then, have done with the one traitor of the two in your hands, while your hands are free!"

They listened because they must. They were saddened because she talked at all, and they were saddened because she talked what seemed to them truth. When she ceased, they seemed like graybeards interrupted in learned converse by a child. They took up again the thread of their deliberations, unmindful that she had spun a new thread into the web.

The old, muddied eyes of the elder of San Marcial peered gropingly around the circle. "Let the Lone Oak be brought," he said. They should wait; they should hear the Lone Oak once more. The elder of the Mesquite Forest, the oldest, most weazend there, and by that token the patriarch of the council board, nodded his head. The elder of Chihuitl burned his finger and thumb on his cigarette, and required a fresh one from the ragged sombrero of the aged man on his left. Of another he asked, with a grunt and a stately manner, a light; and meantime the Lone Oak was brought before them.

Krag could walk, though painfully, and stout Chagre kept at his elbow. Two warrior nurses bore the empty litter, and set it across two bundles of fagots within the council circle. The wounded man was clothed in khaki

and linen. He was coatless, and as white as his shirt was the superb neck rising from the open collar. The face in its clean, squared outline was bloodless. The once furrowed brow was like marble, and as smooth as marble. No hint of the old glint of steel was left in the piercing eyes. That piercing quality of them was gone too. The gray was the soft gray of kindliness, and yet there was a benign austerity, a look of pain and rebuke, in the eyes. The white man did not wish these old children, of whom he was fond, to do aught to make them question their wisdom afterward. One sort of remorse, which was that of ingratitude, would hurt them, and he did not want them hurt. As he stepped into their circle, and sat upon the litter, a certain hopefulness that they would find their right minds brightened in his friendly survey of them.

Dolores stirred restively where she stood outside the circle. He felt her eyes on him like a waiting snake's. It had all been unreasoning jealousy for her child, he told himself, and one pities the blind. He met her look, and smiled. But murderous waywardness must be restrained; she read that clearly in his smile.

Krag's hope for their right minds grew when he saw that the word was with the elder of San Marcial. Krag had brought him through the small-pox, and that mottled and pitted Solon from the Matape made gratitude a shrine for Quixotic worship.

"The *Americano*," said he, "the father of the woman who was your wife, is captured." Krag started. Instantly the kind eyes were shot with anger. "They bring him here," said the elder.

"Then," said Krag, in a voice weakened and hollow, "you can free him the quicker."

"They bring him here," repeated the elder, "and I say now to the council, let him stand in the Lone Oak's place. He is as guilty as the Lone Oak, but to that man we owe nothing."

"What you owe the Lone Oak, then," Krag interposed, quick to humour them on that turn, "pay what you owe the Lone Oak by saving his honour with the *Americano*. Send the man safely back, and you owe the Lone Oak nothing."

The old man of San Marcial had crinkled his forehead terribly to silence the fateful words, but they were seized on already by his brethren of the council. Even in this quandary the Lone Oak had calmly pointed the way out. In a breath he had showed them how to be quit of the debt to himself, and relieved the tangle of all vexation. They pledged themselves to the *Americano's* safety, whereupon the case became one of simple treachery, and susceptible of dosing with precedent.

Chagre put his brown, thick-fingered hands on the shoulders of the condemned, and forced him, with the slow gentleness of iron strength, to his back on the litter. Something never thought of before, yet recognized as one recognizes one's old hat, caught familiarly in Krag's mind: the touch was an executioner's. Chagre's Indian face was — an Indian's. Deep-seamed flesh overspread jutting knobs of skull; black beads of eyes glowed in bony sockets; teeth vented a hissing rage.

"Do it, Chagre," Krag spoke to him reproachfully,

"but do it without anger against me." He supposed that they would begin with his eyes.

The Indian head over him blackened at the words, and the palm of Chagre's hand, horned from the machete's grip, closed over his forehead.

"And Cajemi's daughter?" It was a wheedling voice, reminding him of clotted cream.

Dolores had stolen into the circle, and was looking down on him. Her body was rigid in devouring intensity.

"What of Cajemi's daughter, my fathers?"

She gazed down on the Lone Oak as one already dead. This her ferocity had demanded, because of her child robbed of a supposed birthright. But that passion was sated now in anticipation, and another craved gratification. The whelp of the tigress was weaned. With the cooling of the animal maternal instinct, old fires were kindling anew. She saw again the man who had taken her nose between his fingers. Coming was the woman, for whom he had done that thing. Where, then, would be the Indian girl's triumph, if she was not to flaunt the man before that other woman as the Indian girl's own?

"I have told you, my fathers, of the shame that drove your old chief's daughter from her tribe," she moaned, cunningly letting sobs bear her plaint. "I have told you what brings her back. Say now, must she go again, hiding her face, because her own people have not the pity to right her wrong? This man ——"

The aged sagamore of the Mesquite Forest stopped her, "Enough, Dolores," he said, his shrewd old eyes mocking her. "We understand that you want the man."

The deep rose flamed red beneath her skin, but before

she could retort the elder of San Marcial took the word, speaking coaxingly. He saw in her plea one other chance to save Krag from the extreme conclusion of their logic. What she said offered a premise for a different logic, and he worked it out subtly. While he spoke, he kept both court and condemned in mind, for his task was to win both over.

It began, he reminded them, when the pains of dying had so blurred old Cajemi's craft that he babbled secrets to a woman. Folly thrived, as Cajemi might have known, for then came Dolores hawking her wares, hallooing that she would give the secrets with herself, and who would have her? The Lone Oak, she comes now and wails. And because the tribe wanted the Lone Oak to take a wife among them, and so turn a tribesman, she thought to be the tribe's lure and true daughter in this, and gave ear to the white man's promises. Here the crow's feet about the eyes of the forest philosopher grew alive, and his mouth twitched, so that he shaded his face behind his hand. He of San Marcial proceeded gravely. At last, he said, she gave faith to the promises of the Lone Oak, and for the tribe's sake, she yielded. But having got from her one precious tribal secret, which was the *Veta Negra*, the Lone Oak was content to forego the others rather than make good his word to the girl.

The elder added then what evidence there was to sustain the case. Dolores had fled, but who should know whither she had gone if not the Lone Oak? Who would go to her, perhaps hoping for other secrets, if not he? And that he did go, once at least, was certain, when the child was near to death.

Krag lay quietly, a little frown playing between his eyes. He had heard it all already, but not quite all that was to come. In this that was to come the mercy-courting lawgiver of San Marcial sought the harmonizing efficacy of his Indian's logic. The Lone Oak, he said, was giving his life to keep faith with a white man. Let him, then, hold his honour as high for a poor Yaqui woman. Let him do that, and the council would trust him thereafter as true to his word in all things. They would know him for a tribesman, and know their secret in fit hands. Else, scorning a chieftain's daughter, the Lone Oak must find in that pilfered secret his fate. Let the Lone Oak then speak.

Krag did not rise from where he lay on the litter. He did not glance toward that door of life opened to him. He had told them already that he owed Dolores nothing. He could only bid them again to pause. They were headstrong, and he would shield them from ugly regret.

He spoke, looking up at the sky, and they heard him. His voice sounded a long way off, or was a disembodied voice, the hollow accents born oracle-like in mid-air.

The council was roused to stubbornness. The hearts of the old men beat as the heart of the tribe, and each, unknown to its neighbour, began to palpitate with misgivings. The old men saw how they had come to depend on the white man, and fear left them cold as they beheld themselves and their tribe, unschooled in white men's craft, bereft of this white man, their protector. They glanced mutely at one another as though they had heard an oracle of doom.

Yet, it seemed, the white man's craft was turned against

them. No, surely, they must know his loyalty better before they could let him live. Such guarantee, they believed in their stress and blind groping, would issue from his adoption into the tribe by marriage. A woman's grievance served as a pretext of state, and on it they doggedly fastened their hopes.

The elder of Chihuitl, in his youth a scout and in his age full of cunning, voiced with smooth tongue their common thought. His brother from the Rio Matape, he said, had spoken words as clear as the spring waters of justice, and he for one would no believe that the Lone Oak could spurn the pleasant draught. For all that the Lone Oak had done for the tribe, they must give him yet a chance. They must even plead with him. They owed him — and the old man bent his brows hideously round the circle — the one last plea in their power to make.

Krag's eyes, as he heard, widened on the heavens above. "Tell them, Chagre, to kill me at once. I'm afraid I cannot bear ——"

A hand fell wrathfully over his mouth. "Do as they say, do as they say!" Chagre snarled.

Krag impatiently shook his head.

"He will not?" The elder of Chihuitl swept the circle with a glance, and resignedly shrugged his shoulders. "Then —" he said, and stopped. His pause was the council's decision.

The elder of the Mesquite Forest, holding up a finger for the grunt and nod of assent of the others, then sharply clapped his hands, and gestured to the first three young braves who looked his way.

Withered grandams stood by, scolding raucously, while men robbed the fires under the pots. Into earthen jars they scooped up the hottest coals. Men, when their lordly affairs demanded, ever trod roughshod on woman's domestic convenience. The coals were heaped on the ground within the council circle, near the litter where Krag lay. Warriors, women, and children, noticing these preparations, gave over other pursuits to watch. They fringed the circle of old men, expectant and entertained. Such occasions were of particular interest to the children, much as is hog-killing time on the farm to other children.

Chagre, being so ordered, thrust his machete into the coals with its point under the glowing heap. On his knees, his high cheek-bones reddening like coals themselves, he blew into the mass. The women and children stared while the steel slowly took another hue, the hue slowly deepening and spreading toward the handle. If their eyes lifted, they lifted to the still form in khaki and white linen on its couch of boughs.

"See Chagre's face, how angry black it is," said a warrior, laughing. "But fire does make a machete soft, and it is Chagre's machete, poor boy."

Gripped by Chagre's knotted fist, the blade was slipping from the coals when there came a strange interruption that disappointed eager expectancy and stirred the elders to indignation. It was Dolores, brushing her way into the circle, catching up Chagre's *serape* from the ground, and hurriedly spreading it over Krag, so that he was covered from head to foot.

But before the elders could rebuke her, she ran and

stood before the patriarch of the Mesquite Forest, since he was the head man of the council, and pointed back along the lane between the thatched huts to where the trail entered the village.

"There," she whispered excitedly, "there, the captives! The *Americano* and his daughter, they are coming. They are here, but" — she turned swiftly, and pointed to Krag —"*he* must not see her. He must not see the woman who was his wife. He must not know that she is near. And she — she must not look on his face or hear his voice."

"This wench is crazy," exclaimed the village elder.

"Don't you understand?" she urged. "Why, why," she laughed wildly, "why, my fathers, do you not know that Tetibite lied to the Lone Oak? Lied — yes, Tetibite — telling him that the woman was married to another man. It was a lie, because Tetibite could not bear to see the love of the Lone Oak go even to a woman. Yet, though he believes the woman lost to him, the Lone Oak welcomes the torture rather than take another woman. Now do you know that he must not learn that she is near? Once he sees her ——"

"—— he will have no ears for our prayer. Is that it, Dolores?"

"Yes, and no flesh to feel, no bones to break, no blood to — oh, dig his grave and have done, unless ——"

The patriarch waved his hand. "Go, Dolores," he said, "and see to it. Take care that she does not come near."

CHAPTER THIRTEEN

Treasure Trove

"OH," EXCLAIMED Maisie breathlessly, swaying from the climb up the precipitous trail, "isn't it—beautiful—up here! See, father, you come on it so suddenly, like discovering a cool grotto among the rocks, only," she added, gazing up at the peaks, "each rock is a mountain. Look, those clustering huts. Why, we're in an Indian village."

"Call Fesco, won't you?" snapped her father. He rode the mule. Maisie trudged behind him on foot. "Call him, for I'm thirsty, and the lazy brute's lagging behind again with the water bottle. — Scenery?" he complained. "May, I don't seem to be able to make you understand what a damnable outrage this is to me."

If he were able, she thought, all cheer might well take wing into gloom. He had said that a thousand times, at least, until even a filial, gentle soul like Maisie vaguely suspected that his saying it was the worst outrage to bear, especially when she was sinking in weariness, when she could almost hear her baby Alice asking for her, when she wanted so badly just to give over and cry. To keep trying to be buoyant and comforting was very hard, and it occurred to her that her father might have made it easier for her.

"I may yet, father. Don't lose hope of me." She smiled up at him, but a little bit quizzically, as she quickened her steps and steadied her body by a hand on his stirrup. She had insisted on sharing the mule with him and, as though to have an end of her clamour, he had crossly accepted.

Dolores came running to them, and spoke a few words with the leader of their captors, and they were taken to one of the huts of the village. Like most Yaqui huts, it was swept clean, as though a comb had passed over the earth floor, and there was a low stone corral in front for the household goats and pigs.

"Why, they're having a *fiesta*," exclaimed Maisie, taking a survey from the door-way. "You know father, it's a sort of country fair, only a Yaqui *fiesta* must be different and especially interesting. Look, I wonder if they're having games over there. See them all crowded round in a ring. What's going on inside? Oh father, let's ——"

Hacklette caught her wrist. He exchanged a look with Dolores. "You stay here. They don't want you intruding."

"But — don't you see, father — through that gap — pshaw, now it's closed again. Weren't they funny, though, all those old men squatted round on the ground as solemn as a — a spook seance? Look, there's another gap! Why, they've got a little fire, and a man seems to be stirring it. Now he's holding the poker — or whatever it is — up like a torch . . . Oh dear, they're packed close again, and I ——"

Hacklette's face was putty white. "Never mind,"

he cut her short. "It's none of your business. You go inside. I suppose they're only trying that fellow —— that — the one Dolores said fooled her."

"Oh!" — she looked pityingly at Dolores — "I do hope he will listen to reason. She looks so woe-begone, as forsaken and as — as a gutter cat. Do they need the fire to keep warm? . . . Father, I can see the man now — she stabbed him, she said. That must be why he's lying on a cot, because he's wounded, poor, horrid creature. And that man who had the poker, he's leaning over him, asking him, I suppose, ques ——"

"*Maisie!*" In the unreasoning anger of horror, her father caught her and pushed her into the hut. But being himself drawn irresistibly, he ran stumbling, panting, toward that living arena. Dolores remained behind, to look on the white woman's face when the triumphant time should come that she awaited.

Krag, as he lay with shirt cut away from his breast, saw in vivid detail flashing pictures that are commonplace: a little boy on a hearth rug with building blocks scattered round; a boarding-house table — some one, a man with eyeglasses, asked for the bread; a porter making up a berth; a clerk with polka-dotted tie measuring off two yards of . . . Abruptly a noose, a hundred, his own muscles, tightened round his body, and his body strained till it lifted, answering a magic touch and forked tongues of pain.

"*Fire meets flesh!*" a voice intoned over him.

A shrivelled hand, that of the aged forest elder in the council circle, raised at the first syllable.

But now a dispute went up in the fringe outside

the circle. "I saw the smoke first," cried a Yaqui child.

"You did not. But I *hear* it. S-s-s, there, a sizzling.

"Of course," clamoured a third youngster, "but who has the quickest nostril? Wait, who can smell . . . "

The shrivelled hand of the patriarch fell, the touch lifted, and the white, seared body relapsed to its couch. A face, mottled and pitted, that of the elder of San Marcial, bent over the tortured man, putting a question. Krag's head rolled on its pallet, answering the question. The elder straightened — if reluctantly none might know from his stoic countenance — and his voice intoned:

"*But the spirit is rock.*"

Chagre thrust his machete back into the coals, drew it out, and went back to the litter, again lifting an edge of the *serape* and baring a surface of white gleaming flesh. It was then that Hacklette was crazed. A wildly agitated intrusion of tailored commonplace, he burst on the scene as from bedlam just escaped. Hands clutched for him vainly as he hurtled through the fringe of villagers. The squatted sachem in his path toppled forward, and he broke the rim of the council circle, reeling. He flung himself between the poised machete and the tender white flesh. "I cain't stand it! I cain't! I cain't!" He had a vision of Krag's face, of locked jaws, of lips and blood-flecked foam, of purpled eyeballs. It made his rage and indignation tenfold greater. He shook his palsied fists over the face on the pallet. "Don't you see I cain't stand it? I cain't! I cain't!"

Krag's set jaws relaxed, and the lower jaw dropped. But at once the gaping mouth closed, and the lips curled,

in almost a smile. If a sneer, it was sublime. The lips moved. "Don't worry. You're — safe — They'll take — you back, but — they're — busy now."

"No, it's this — *this*!" cried Hacklette. He pointed in a frenzy to the bared flesh, discoloured by an angry, livid stripe. "Make 'em stop! You got to! I cain't stand it. Do what they want. Make 'em stop. I——"

"Chagre — oh, Chagre," Krag's lips moved faintly, "take him — away."

Until now the elders had not interfered. Fesco the interpreter had whispered to them that the *Americano* would only try to bend the Lone Oak to their will. Chagre seemed not to hear Krag feebly calling to him, though he stood near with the machete ready.

Hacklette realized that they were going to begin again, and frantically he tried to think out this thing. He was aware of something fine, and beyond his ken, in a man enduring — *this* — for constancy to a woman; for a woman, moreover, whom he could hope never to see again. But Hacklette's soul knew nothing of homage. He preceived in it only his despair. Dolores had lied. The man was now the proof of that. He would never yield, and Hacklette felt his mind slipping away. The craven faced the unspeakable horror of going mad. He must save himself. He must stop them.

Truculent Chagre, impatient seemingly to be back at his work, elbowed Hacklette out of the way, so closely indeed that Hacklette felt the heat of the machete blade on his cheek. He uttered an incoherent cry, staggered to the other side of the litter, and bent over Krag.

"You got to know," he muttered hoarsely, "you got to! You got to know that May — Maisie — that she is here. Yes — don't speak. There ain't time —— she's right over yonder. Listen. Now you tell 'em she's your wife. They'll kill you then, knowing that — *this* — ain't no more use. They got to stop. I tell you I cain't stand it."

The tortured man, tortured in what he just heard as he alone could know, slowly shook his head. He could not tell them that. They would call Maisie to ask if it were true. Maisie would learn that he was still alive. He shook his head. No!

Hacklette was infuriated. "You don't understand," he cried. "She'd tell them it's true. Man, man —" he wavered, but saw no other way — "it *is* true! It is, I tell you. She is — *she is still your wife.*"

Krag looked steadily into his face. "You are lying," he said. "And — why let her know I am here? Why make her see me die? Chagre," he called, "go, tell the council that its promise to save this — the *Americano* — must be given to save the — any one — who came with him. Go, Chagre. Tell them also to keep this — the *Americano* — where he cannot trouble us. Go, go."

The council's hope of the *Americano*, and its patience, were gone. Two warriors came and dragged Hacklette back into the crowd. Krag heard his own plea, or his last command, repeated by Chagre, and heard their answer. They agreed, and in thankfulness he closed his eyes to await the end. Of all that seemed hardest to bear was the thought that she was not to look

on his dead face. He believed he would surely know, and know comfort, if she did.

Will and tendons strained, and were braced against the coming of the touch. He heard the faint spitting hiss of the metal, and his jaws sank into their locked embrace. But his eyes opened, wide and wondering. They opened on two heads over him, each facing the other, and two pairs of eyes, each on the other; eyes in the mottled, pitted face of the elder of San Marcial, incredulous, full of question, awed; and Chagre's eyes, sullen, defiant, silently menacing the elder. As in a trance, the elder's lips moved:

"*Fire meets flesh!*"

Krag lifted his head, staring. It was thrust roughly back on the pallet.

"Chagre, Chagre," he moaned in tones of heart-rending rebuke, "what are you doing?"

He gathered a deep breath, to cry out protest to the council. A corner of the *serape* was pressed down on his face, smothering the cry.

A murmuring of disappointment rose among the Yaquis around the circle. They could not see, for Chagre was doing his work under a lifted fold of the *serape*. They had not looked for weakness from the Lone Oak. Yet they could not mistake those sobs of agony. Perhaps he wanted to yield, but was Chagre stifling his words that he might prolong the ordeal? The murmuring grew to anger. What added torment was Chagre inflicting, that their Lone Oak, near death already from opening wounds, should groan with pain? And it was this unspeakable devil, Chagre, who had healed those wounds!

It was this same Chagre, of distorted, grimacing visage, of the horrible Death's head even now breaking into sweat, for whom the Lone Oak was marked by a Mexican bullet across the temple, when going back to look for him after a skirmish. They remembered that the Lone Oak never left a Yaqui for dead until he saw that he was dead, and that day the Lone Oak had saved Chagre.

"Chagre, Chagre! You only make it worse, Chagre!" They could hear that rebuke again, terrible as the anguish of the Crucified One whose lips were moistened with vinegar.

Yet they could laugh at Hacklette, going mad. This white man repaid them. The Yaquis round him made merry. "Eh, *Señor Americano*, thy soul hath a weak stomach!" They hoisted him up, so that he must see. He turned his head, covered his eyes, but looked again, enthralled by the hideous fascination. He mumbled to himself, clutching at Reason. "It cain't be, it cain't be! It's too outrageous. No, no, it cain' t be!" His eyes were becoming glassy. His words fell away to noiseless mouthing. As though the crazed mind gathered demoniac strength from terror, he burst into a shriek — "*Maisie!*"

She heard. But nothing except intuition could have made her know that the horrid screech was her father's voice. She was inside the hut, unsuspecting, talking to Dolores near the door. It came over her in an instant that her father was being torn limb from limb. Dolores would have stopped her, but before Dolores knew, she was outside and running like a deer toward the Yaquis.

She caught glimpses of her father's face. It was a

spectral face above the tawny throng. He was wildly gesticulating to her. She saw that he was not being harmed, nor threatened, yet something terrible must have happened, or was happening. Then, when she had almost joined him, he seemed to wave her away, and she half stopped, bewildered, not understanding. But he waved his arm yet more frantically, and his lips worked speechlessly. He was waving her past him — where?

The Yaquis understood before she did. The elder presiding over the council saw her coming and sent a warrior to hold her. Dolores was running to overtake her. But the nearest Yaquis crowded round. They kept Dolores from her. They kept the council's messenger from her. Their murmuring centred here on something definite. Their wrath became coherent. They would have swept away the council itself and every grayhead there. Maisie saw a path opening before her, a path to an open space hedged round by squatting old men. In the open space were two men leaning over a blanket-covered form on a litter. She looked back at her father. His gesture was frenzy itself; he waved her on. She knew only that her father was going insane, and to humour him she must do as he said.

Still looking back at him, to be certain that she was doing as he wanted, and seeing him wildly nod his head, she kept on, like one in sleep. Chagre stood aside, dropping a machete, and hastily thrust his left hand in his blouse. The other man, the elder of San Marcial, stepped back. Still her father waved his hand. He must mean the figure on the cot. She went and stood beside the

cot. Mechanically she turned back a corner of the *serape* — a still, white face, rugged, serene; carved, it seemed, in marble!

Men breathed while she looked, it seemed so long; so long while the blood left her cheeks, and the pain of joy and grief widened her eyes; and long, too, as she sank to her knees, and laid her face against his face, and her lips to his lips, and as she sobbed: "My darling . . . My darling!"

He lay unconscious, and she in her unutterable tenderness was oblivious of all the world, and then it was that Coyote — the chief — Tetibite — rode into the village.

Straight among them he rode, this fierce and barbaric war lord of the Yaquis. He was superbly mounted. He was dazzling in *charro* splendour. Instead of a Mexican army at his heels, he brought a banished people to their homes. They were the Yaqui *pacíficos*, the women, children, and feeble men who had been captured by Mexicans and condemned to Yucatan. Yet here they were, restored to their tribe and kin. The village's amazement changed to rapture. Sons and daughters, brothers and sisters, here a father, there a mother, flocked around the banished ones, mingling shouts of rejoicing.

The young chief understood instantly the scene he interrupted. He had been hearing news on his way hither of charges against the Lone Oak, against himself, of two white captives, of all the treacherous mischief set on foot by the catamount Dolores. A glance at the council circle, at the prostrate form on the litter, and the sobbing woman, a few words from the warriors

crowded about his horse's head, these were enough. The cold glitter lay deadly and still and viper-like in his eyes.

"I am hungry," he cried in lordly insolence. "Let these old men tend the pots and kettles. Hereafter they who do the fighting will do the talking." He swerved his horse, a vicious, fiery mustang, and scattered the elders headlong before the dancing hoofs. Much of hoary dignity sulked in the huts the rest of that day.

Riding thus into the council circle, the war lord of the Yaquis leaped to the ground beside the litter and its burden, and raised his hand, and the tribe gathered round him. He bared his white teeth as he spoke, and the glittering viper eyes held every Yaqui there.

He had gone to the enemy's capital city, he said, neither as prisoner nor guest. As victor he had gone. To his enemy's teeth he had said what the Yaquis must have. He had spoken as the Lone Oak had counselled him to speak. To the president in his palace he had spoken. Let the tribe say, then, if it would have, or would not have, the peace he brought. He brought them their valley, their sierra, their homes. He brought them farms, grazing lands, metal-bearing ledges, hunting grounds. He brought them all they fought for, and more. If they wanted that for which they fought, let them take it. If their enemy did not keep faith, they could always fight again. But as sign of the Mexican's faith, he brought the banished kinsmen. While whips cracked over them, while they were going into the slave-ships, the president's word came and changed all that. But if the tribe wanted nothing of peace, then must farewells

be said, for each banished one had pledged his honour to return if there were no peace.

The whining of old men? He answered the whining of old men as chief. He answered with a beaten foe. He answered with the fruit of victory. He answered with what, since the first Spaniard, other chiefs had fought for and had not won. He, Tetibite, was not greater than those great chieftains before him. The tribe he led was less than the tribe they had led. Yet he had won! But why had he won? He laid his hand on the body of the unconscious, wounded, tortured man. Like that, he said, Yaquis thanked him who showed them how to win.

His hand raised. He would not hear murmuring protest. He went on. There was lamentation because of a mine, he had heard. But the mine was the Lone Oak's own. The mine was the Lone Oak's because the Lone Oak had found it. The mine had been lost to the tribe, but the Lone Oak found it again. The Lone Oak gave the mine to the saving of the tribe, and they grudged him a few sacks of the ore for his wife and child who had been robbed. But the Lone Oak meant to give the mine to the tribe when peace should come. He meant to care for it for them so that the white men of the Great Stack would not cheat them; and thus he meant to dwell among them as their physician always.

"And the Lone Oak told me," said the chief, "to go to the books of the Mexicans, when I might do so because of the new peace, and take the papers he gave me, and ask the Mexicans to write down the mine in their books in the name of the Tribe of the Yaquis, so I ——"

"No, no, rose an old, strident voice from the throng, "the mine is the Lone Oak's own. Let it then be in his name."

The tribe was a troubled sea, and looking over his people whence the voice came, the chief saw that the speaker was the elder of Chihuitl. His words might have been a signal, for they were echoed turbulently.

Coyote's tongue, the bright red tip of his tongue, darted out and touched his coppery lips. "Thou withered fool —" he pointed a lean finger at the elder — "keep to thy pots and kettles." Then they knew that the *Veta Negra* was written already in the Lone Oak's name, in his name of an American of the North, and that the chief had had it written so.

The form on the litter lay as the dead. The woman kneeling there, covering the still face with her own, gave no heed to those around her, even when her father came and lifted her to her feet and led her away, her face buried in her hands against his shoulder. Until now the Yaqui chief had kept from him, by a savage's will, the thought of his friend lying there dead. The Indian in him shunned the recognition of that thing. He feared to give it voice, fearing his voice must quaver. But when he saw the futile relenting about him, a tide of anger swept grief with it.

"What good now, what good now," he cried, "when ye have killed him?"

Chagre, his left hand in his blouse as though clasping a weapon, confronted the chief. "You do not know he is dead," he said.

"Chagre!" The chief raised his hand to strike. "But thou knowest. Thou ——"

Sullen voices grumbled in the throng. "It was Chagre," they muttered, "Chagre, who held the machete! Chagre, who killed him!" They clamoured for Chagre's blood, all except the elder of San Marcial, who only stood and gazed, inscrutably, at the imperilled Chagre.

"You do not know that he is dead," Chagre repeated, his beads of eyes deep and evil in their sockets.

They would have struck him down had not the accents of murder beat upon the walls of the tomb. Krag's eyes opened. He awakened from that swoon-like death. "Chagre" had been the moan on his lips as he sank under the waters. "Chagre" was the questioning plaint when he rose again. Above him he saw Chagre's face, and a clenched fist raised over it for the first blow.

Krag's arm lifted waveringly from his side. Lines of pain between his eyes showed the force of will that was needed. This time no rough hand thrust him back, and his own hand fell on Chagre's left wrist and drew Chagre's left hand from his blouse. The chief looked. Those nearest looked. The eyes of all who might see were fixed on Chagre's left hand. The fingers of that hand were seared to the bone, where hot steel had lain across them.

A cold light grew in the black pupils of Coyote's eyes. It was jealousy, like that which had inspired his lie to Krag. This jealousy was murderous, because another than himself was given the chance to do for the Lone Oak what Chagre had done. He heard the murmuring

that exalted Chagre. Chagre's act was a Yaqui act, and they exalted that. Their chief would be first in that.

"Be proud, *ay*, be proud, Chagre," said the chief, "and I call thee brother, but—keep thyself far from me."

Some one led to Coyote a child, a naked, satin-skinned, two-year-old willow of manhood. It was the *Americano*, the man Hacklette, who led the child. The Yaqui chief stooped until he looked into a pair of little, round, bright, lustrous black eyes. Every grandam there, and even the men, were caught by the same thought; their chief was gazing on himself. The resemblance had caught Hacklette already. There was no mistaking—those eyes, the lean skull, the straight body—a splinter off the same arrow—the timber wolf's own cub. There was no mistaking Coyote's salutation: "Hail, the little chief!" No mistaking the way he gathered the warm little body of copper to him!

Dolores, all fierceness and snarls and claws, would have snatched the child away, but Coyote rose and caught both her wrists under the fingers of one hand. He laughed gleefully, wickedly.

"My mountain cat," he cried, bending her to him, while high on his shoulder he poised the boy. "My mountain cat, mine to tame! And I was afraid," he laughed, "of growing sluggish in the fat days of peace!"

Maisie saw, but gave it no heed. Krag slept, or had swooned again, and she had crept again to his pillow. Suddenly an awed, whispered cry thrilled her.

"The angels . . . No, *Maisie!*"

Jim's eyes were open.

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